GLORIA
A GIRL and HER DAD

LILIAN GARIS

Virginia B. Vaughan.
Christmas 1928.

GLORIA:
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"THERE YOU ARE!" SAID GLORIA.

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By

LILIAN GARIS

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CHAPTER I

COMPANIONS

THE boy was taller than the girl, this could be noticed from quite a distance, but other marks of difference, such as Gloria's red cheeks and Tom's brave freckles, her black eyes flashing while Tom's were meek, blue and shadowy; these distinct and contrary characteristics were only observable when one looked under Gloria's floppy white hat, or glimpsed Tom's quaint, boyish person at a little distance.

There was that about Gloria which compelled a close scrutiny, under the brim of her hat seemed the very point of vantage, while Tom—one would hate to scrutinize Tom. Even the friendliest notice would seem rude if too closely given. He was not bashful, really, nor was he in any way

stupid, on the contrary, his alert mind that only flashed out in moments of unchecked enthusiasm was the magnet that held Gloria Doane to his companionship, ever since they had both toddled off to their first battle with learning, in the back room of Miss Mary Drake's Fancy Store. But few others understood Tom, they were generally too busy condemning Gloria's lack of discrimination in her selection of such a companion.

Besides those shadowy blue eyes Tom also had freckles—a real saddle of them across his nose; splendid, healthy, ginger brown freckles. They were rather unfair to the nose, however, destroying what might have been an aristocratic outline; but freckles are like that—ruthless when once they get a footing. Being tall, having freckles and possessing a musically liquid voice, gave Tom his chief claim to personality, but his own mother called him Tommy-lad and declared he was a fine, upstanding little youngster.

Just as Gloria Doane had a father and no mother, so Tom Whitely had a mother and no father. This similarity of parental privation may have forged the bond of companionship stronger; at any rate, Gloria and Tom were chums.

All the joys of country life ever piped in poet's

tunes would be flat and monotonous if unshared by a chum. You may talk of the music of the birds and the magic of the running brook, even of the glory of wild daisy fields and the beauty of sovereign sunsets, but to youth, to the eager young and even to childhood, these would be all rather stupid in solitude. There is no solitude in the city—that can be said in its favor. Even a sick boy or girl may be shut up in narrow quarters there, but somehow the hum of companionship will reach in and sometimes cheer. But in the country it is very different.

Without a chum would be like being without a roof, or even without a family dog. That life around a fishing village is not apt, however, to be so solitary as is found inland, and it was in the seaside town of Barbend that our interesting little friends lived.

Vacation had been particularly merry; picnics, lawn parties, launch trips and even city scouting parties filled the days with continual change and thrilling variety. Tom had earned more than ever before in any vacation, and Gloria felt like a pinwheel revolving in golden sprayed breezes of good times and surprise adventures. Only a few weeks remained now, then the new adventure

of fresh school days, with brand new programmes and mysterious possibilities in new teachers (two were due at Barbend this year), these delights, in spite of dreaded routine and perhaps hated studies, beckoned every girl and boy in the township; to say nothing of the hurried last stitches being put in new blouses for the boys and into new dresses for the girls, by anxious mothers.

The launch Finnan-Laddie was lapping the dock just after Gloria had stepped ashore, and Tom happened to be passing from the swamp with a great basket of pond lilies for his next day's sales. Automatically they fell into step, if that could be said of their peculiar motion, Gloria sort of easing into Tom's shuffle with a queer little grace note trick that kept the tempo going.

No greetings were exchanged. Would one say hello to the sun, or to the moon or even to some familiar star?

"How did you make out?" asked Gloria, eagerly.

"All right," replied Tom.

"Can it be fixed?"

"Sure."

"It's a wonder you weren't killed."

Tom grinned. "That wasn't anything."

"It wasn't!" Gloria's voice boomed. "Well, if it wasn't, then I don't ever want to see another bicycle spill."

"Not even at the races?"

"No. I hate spills anyhow. They make you gulp and you can't see anything but dust."

"You saw my basket go, didn't you?"

"I should say I did. I thought it would never stop bumping over the stones until it went straight into the brook. But, Tom, honest, you ought to be more careful."

"Oh, listen who's talking!"

"Just the same, I never ride over that hill with a clothes basket full of pond lilies and an arm full of papers."

"But you do ride over there with trees full of blossoms——"

"Oh, well. That was only when we had to get the school decorated——"

"And this was only when I had a big order——"

They laughed, gave in and changed the subject.

"What if your mother finds out?" persisted Gloria.

"She won't."

"A lot of folks saw you. They were down waiting for the launch."

"Well, 'twasn't anything."

"Tom Whitely! You almost rolled over on the railroad track and Mrs. Trivett nearly had a heart spell."

"Oh, Mrs. Trivett!"

"But she talks more than half of the town."

"Who listens to her?"

"Folks can't help it. She's so—pesky." Gloria dropped a spray of golden rod.

"My mother never bothers with her."

"But you know, Tom, others listen to her, and then—then. Just suppose someone tells your mother you rolled down that hill when the Flyer was whistling——"

"Say, Glo. Who's been stringing you?"

"Tom Whitely, that's no way to talk." Gloria's nose seemed to sniff her hat brim, and her black eyes flashed at the willows they were passing.

"Oh, I didn't mean it." Tom's voice was caressing now. His eyes blinked and he changed his big basket to the other arm in spite of Gloria's blue gingham dress and her own armful of sweet-flag roots being on that side. There was plenty

of room now, however, for she had edged off toward the stone wall.

The road turned at the creek—Tom would go one way and Gloria the other, but before they separated they had made up the momentary difference. Just as it began it ended. Neither boy nor girl was subject to any nonsensical apologies or explanations over such silly little trifles.

"If I were you, Tom, just the same, I'd tell my mother I had a spill and that your bike is broken. Then——"

"Oh, yes, I know, Gloria. That's easy enough to say. But you don't know my mother."

"I do so."

"I mean, like I know her."

"Of course I don't know her as well as you do."

"Then you can't know how she fusses. I don't want her to know I had that spill, Gloria, and if you hear folks talking about it just hush them up. I didn't get hurt——"

"You did, too, Tom Whitely!"

"Oh, that!" scoffed Tom. "I don't call that getting hurt."

"Just the same, I'll bet you don't swim for a week."

"I don't have to."

"All right," conceded Gloria with a show of impatience. "Of course you don't *have* to——"

"Say, Glo!" Again Tom's voice mellowed. "You know I'm not—not forgetting your kindness. I always count on that," he said a little awkwardly. "But you see how it is. If mother ever hears I spilled I'll have the awfullest time getting her to believe that I don't spill every day just for fun, you know. Mother's a brick, but gosh! She can stew."

"I know, Tom, and you're just a brick, too, trying to save her." Gloria always talked very slowly when a parent was under discussion. "I know how it is with my dad——"

"Oh, you're dad is a peach."

"He sure is. A perfect peach." Every word was beautifully rounded and just rolled from Gloria's lips like solid balls of tone. "I often think how your mother has to be father and mother, and my dad has to be both, just the same." She stopped and almost sighed, but Gloria Doane was not the sighing kind. "Anyhow, Tom, we've got a wonderful pair between us," she boomed.

"That's right." Tom shifted the basket again

and the effect of the much discussed spill was not completely hidden in the frown that scattered with the effort, his freckles. "That's why, Glo, I hate to worry mother."

"Then take my advice." Gloria laughed that she should indulge in advice. "Tell her about it." Tom attempted to speak but the girl hurried on. "That is, tell her *something* about it."

"Well, maybe."

"And, Tom," her sweet-flag roots were shedding their damp grains of earth over her checked gingham, "how are you going to get the bike fixed?"

"Got to wait—till I earn it, extra."

"Then you'll have to walk."

"That's nothing."

"It will take twice as long."

"I know. But the chain's broke."

"Where is it?"

"Up at Nash's."

"How much will it cost?"

"How much do you think?"

"I couldn't guess. Millie had hers overhauled and the bill was ten dollars."

"Gee whiz! Glad mine won't be that much. But it will be three dollars," said Tom ruefully.

"I'll tell you, Tom. I've got five dollars——"

"As if I'd borrow money from a girl!"

"It isn't borrowing. I'm just offering it to you till you earn it," insisted Gloria. "It doesn't make one bit of difference to me."

Tom looked thoughtfully far ahead—clear past the blackberry clump. He needed that wheel. He was earning something worth while. He carried all the orders for the vegetable store in his handle-bar basket. Gloria saw his indecision and eagerly followed it.

"Go ahead, Tom. This is my own money——"

"Oh, I know that. You wouldn't offer anyone else's."

"And I've just got it along with me. The folks who had our launch out just paid——"

"Wouldn't that be your dad's?"

"No. He owes it to me and said I was to collect it."

"Of course, I know," agreed Tom affably. "But I can earn it——"

"If you don't take it, Tom, perhaps you will never get another chance to refuse."

"Why? Going up in the air?"

"No, not up in the air—but perhaps," Gloria's

face suddenly became a mysterious casket of secrets, "I've got a big thing to tell you."

Tom looked at his companion eagerly. It was as if his boyish sense of alarm had sounded a gong some place around his indefinite heart.

"Going away?" he asked very slowly.

"It's more than that." Girls love to tease boys. "But I won't tell you one word now. Are you going to take this money?"

She was holding out her brown hand; on its palm rested two green bills.

Tom set his basket down and looked very serious. He kicked his sneakers into the soft earth, he swung his uninjured arm like a pendulum, he opened and closed his lips a number of times. Then he put out his hand and took the money over.

CHAPTER II

TOMMY-LAD

JUST as if any boy *or* girl, or any boy *and* girl, could deceive a mother about a thing like that! Tom Whitely was painted up like an Indian before he even had his supper, and not satisfied with the iodine and arnica in the house, Mrs. Whitely had asked Pete Duncan to get more from the drug store when he went in to the post-office for the evening mail.

"Tommy-lad, you're too reckless altogether," she scolded affectionately. The bandage on the bruised arm was patted gently but fondly, and then the sleeve was slipped over it without so much as brushing the lint.

"'Tisn't anything, mother," protested the boy repeatedly.

"Too reckless and anxious for the dollar. Why, son, you don't have to do all the supporting, you know. Mother is able and quite popular yet with them who didn't have the chance she

had to learn how to sew." Mrs. Whitely was shaking her brown head with a show of pardonable pride, and anyone could have seen by the shadows that made her blue eyes look gray, just whom Tommy looked like.

"That's all right, ma, but Summer's the time, you know," argued the boy. There was a favorite supper simmering on the stove, its appetizing odor provoking Tommy to impatience.

"And old Sam Powers was here a while ago. Didn't say what he wanted, but from the way he worked his handsome face," she chuckled, "it must have been something mighty important."

"I'll have to go up——"

"Now, we'll just see about that, Tommy-lad," interrupted the well-meaning little mother. How could she know Tommy was anxious to go out and see about that bicycle chain? She couldn't and he didn't want her to.

"But there might be a special letter for me to deliver," argued Tom, slyly.

"There's more boys than one in Barbend, and besides, you haven't your wheel."

"My basket was so full of the lilies——"

"Yes, I know, and it shakes them to a frazzle, the little beauties." She glanced at the tub which

made a nest for the lilies. The fragrant blooms now closing their waxy petals looked so cool, comfortable and happy there, it was easy to see that no root had been cruelly dislodged in their gathering, and to understand that a pond lily can make a home anywhere in water.

As always happens when one tries to tell part of the truth, Tom's story to his mother, that the slight injuries and serious number of scratches had resulted from a toss into a clump of briar bushes, wove a web of complications which only entangled him more as he tried to escape from it. Sam Powers, the man who ran the general store and helped out Postmaster Johnston by supplying the special delivery boy, would not have called at the Whitely home for anything trifling. Even Tom's mother suspected trouble and perhaps that was one reason why she tried to keep her son home just now. He was young, and to her, very tender; the only child she had, and he constituted her entire family and likewise the object of her entire heroic devotion. As Tom had told Gloria "she fussed a lot"—but even fussing did not always keep Tommy-lad at the end of her neat apron strings. So, with supper over, the table cleared and his mother installed on the side

porch where no vines obscured the late twilight as she read the weekly paper, Tom was slipping off, slowly but surely village-ward.

At the creek he met Sidney Brown, a boy who "dressed up" and wore a hat week days.

"Hey, Tom! Sam's looking for you," called out Sidney.

"I'm going there," answered Tom sharply, his wonder increasing. Why had Sam scattered the news? Couldn't he wait until Tom had his supper down?

Up at the village, the little triangle composed of a group of stores and including the post-office, Tom found things still closed up for supper. Sam Powers' store was locked, just a little girl was "minding" the grocery store next door, but there was no sign of life around the post-office. Only the bicycle repair shop showed any activity, and that consisted in Abe Nash, the proprietor, spilling some rubbish into a broken soap box at the side door.

Tom hurried over. "Hello, Abner!" he called. "Got that bike fixed yet?

The man in the oily duster looked over his specks. Then he kicked the splintered side of the unfortunate soap box. "Fixed!" he repeated,

sending the word out with a hiss from the corner of his mouth. "What do you think this is?"

"Oh, I was down to Sam's and I thought I'd just ask," put in Tom humbly.

"Did-ju see Sam?"

"No. He's not around."

"Well, y'u better wait. He's a-huntin' fer y'u."

"What for? What does he want?" demanded Tom.

Abner Nash stuck his hands deep into the duster pockets. "Somethin' lost, I guess," he muttered.

"Oh," said Tom. He was holding the two green bills Gloria had given him, very tightly in his hand and his hand was in his pocket.

"When do y'u want the wheel?" asked Abner.

"Quick as I can get it."

"How y'u goin' to pay for it? Three dollars for that new chain."

"Oh, I've got the money right now," said Tom, innocently producing the bills.

"You have, eh! Humph! Well, you're pretty smart. Sell all them lilies since you picked them?"

Tom's shadowy eyes glared. He saw now what Abe Nash meant.

"No, I didn't," he retorted. "But I've got the money to pay for that wheel when it's ready."

"So I see." The man turned toward the patched netting door. "Well, it'll be ready by to-morrow noon."

Tom looked attentively at the money that he had smoothed out on his hand. Then glancing up, he felt a breath almost over his shoulder.

It was Sam Powers!

"Where'd you get that money?" The man's voice was full of threats.

"Where did I get it?" gasped Tom. "What's that to you?"

A big hand was settling heavily upon his shoulder.

Indignantly he drew back and confronted the man who was attempting to seize him. Tom wanted to "haul off" but instinctively he dropped his hands and relieved his emotion with full, long, audible breaths.

For a few moments neither spoke. Powers was not usually a bully, and even now something like a smile played around his square mouth.

"Come over here and talk it over, Tommy," he said. "No need to get excited."

Boyish indignation choked Tom's reply. Why do grown folks always accuse children first and investigate later?

Tom finally spoke: "What's all this about, anyway?"

"It's about Mrs. Trivett's money."

"I don't know anything about her money."

"Now wait a minute, Tommy. Wait a minute." Each word was separated with a provoking sing-song drawl. It mocked every instinct of justice surging over the boy. "You see—well, you know what old Nancy Trivett is——"

"Sure I do," retorted Tom.

"Now, don't get excited, son." He had unlocked the store door and Tom, helpless to do otherwise, followed him inside. "She came in here this mornin' jest after we packed the first orders. Yes, it was jest after that because——"

"Say, Sam," interrupted Tom. "I've got to get back home. Can't you hurry some?"

"I could, but I was jest tryin' to be polite——"

"Don't bother to be," growled Tom.

"All right, son," Sam continued. "We'll jest cut out the po-lightness and get down to hard tacks. Where'd y'u get that money?"

"Well, I didn't get it around here——"

"Now, I'm not accusin' you, Tom." Again the square smile. "But you see, this ain't pay day and three dollars——"

"Can't anybody in Barbend have three dollars 'cept old Nancy Trivett!"

"Not at the same identical time—'cordin' to Nancy." The chuckle that followed this was drowned in a noisy shuffle of Tom's impatient feet.

"I tell you, Sam, I don't know anything about Trivett's money. This is mine."

"But where'd y'u get it?"

"I got it to pay for my bike—it's broken."

"Oh, I know it's broken. Good thing your neck ain't broke with it. Nancy saw you roll under the car wheels——"

"Is that what gave her a fit? Thought she saw me go under the wheels?"

"No, Tom. No, Tom—son——" a kindness crept into old Sam's voice, "even her best friend would not be good-natured enough to say she *thought* she saw you. The fact is—well, you know Nancy."

It was growing dark. Tom would have hurried off and left Sam to his drawl but he knew better. That would simply have been to invite

Sam to go up to Tom's mother with the same drawl and more mischievous insinuations. So, he said:

"I can't just tell you exactly where I got this money, Sam, but did you ever find me short a cent?"

"Not a red."

"Then why do you suspect me?"

"I don't."

"All right. That settles it. I've got to get home."

"But you know old Abe Nash. He said you was goin' to get your wheel fixed and he said, right to Nancy, that you didn't have any money to pay for it. And now you go and show him a roll."

"How'd she lose her old money?"

"Says she left it on the basket of tomatoes. You took them over."

"Yes, and there was no more money on them than there was diamonds." Tom could be sarcastic. He kicked a peach basket viciously.

"Now I'll tell you, son. Your best game is to give that money back to your maw——"

"I didn't get it from mother."

"You didn't?" there was just a hint of suspicion in Sam's voice now.

"No."

"Well, if you borrowed it from anyone else—give it back."

"All right, Sam, guess I will."

"And let the old Skin-flint Abe wait for his money."

"Ye-ah."

"But how about the orders?"

"That's it. I need the darn wheel."

Both stopped and fell into deep consideration. It all seemed so simple a matter, but to country folks these simple things are momentous.

"If you was to tell me who you got that from, I might see my way clear to advance you the money on next week's pay," suggested Sam, with marked caution.

"I can't tell you, Sam. I promised not to." Tom's blue eyes now went gray as his mother's. He declined Sam's confidence reluctantly.

"Well, that's the best I can do," said Sam. "But take my advice and put a crick in old Abe Nash's sour tongue before he meets up with Nancy."

"All right," said Tom. And on the way home he wondered how he would manage to put that crick in, wisely and effectively.

CHAPTER III

SHADOWS

WHEN Gloria left Tom, after pressing her three dollars upon him, she met her chum Mildred Graham. Millie had been out in a canoe with the girl visiting old Mrs. Jenkins, and like Mrs. Jenkins, her visitor Katherine Bruen, was a most likable person. She had all the city ways and city graces, she dressed stylishly and looked well in the clothes, in fact the girls whom she had met at Barbend considered Kathy quite the most attractive visitor they had been privileged to entertain in a number of summers. Her light brown hair was bobbed, as so many other heads of hair were that year, and she had blue eyes with heavy lashes, rather too heavy to look real, she was plump and wore dresses that seemed to have been poured upon her—they were so slick and plain. Alongside of her, Millie, who was really quite up-to-date, looked rather quaint in her ginghams and flowered voiles.

"We were looking for you," Millie told Gloria when the two fell together walking the remainder of the way to their cottages.

"Oh, I've been working for dad," smiled Gloria. "The pleasantest sort of work—collecting launch dues," she explained.

"We had a wonderful sail. Won't we miss Katherine? She goes in two more days," sighed Millie.

"Yes, we will; I think Kathy is a splendid girl. But, Millie, vacation is almost over for all of us," Gloria reminded her chum.

"I wonder who will be the new teacher and what she will be like?"

"Perhaps I won't be here to find out," said Gloria wistfully. She was purposely mysterious.

"Going away, Glo?"

"Perhaps."

"Where?"

"I may go to boarding school."

"Oh, how lovely!"

"It isn't quite settled yet, and, Millie, you know, I've told you the very first."

Millie looked slyly out of her hazel eyes. "Before Tom?" she asked archly.

"Yes. Before Tom."

"Oh, I know, Glo," and she squeezed the arm next her. "But I love to tease. Tom and you are such a jolly pair."

"If I go I shall surely miss you both," said Gloria, with a solemnity quite new and not exactly natural.

"As if we won't miss you!" Millie's tone was equally dramatic.

"Well, Millie, you know how long I have hoped for the chance and I am not perfectly positive it has arrived now. But my Aunt Lottie always promised to educate both me and my cousin Hazel. She, Aunt Lottie, was an invalid, you know, and was afraid to part with any of her money while she lived lest some turn in her ailment might mean very big expenditures. She was lovely, poor little Aunt Lottie!"

The affection and sympathy in Gloria's voice filled the space of several moments as they walked. The red roof of Gloria's low house could be seen through the trees in the settling twilight, and the late summer flowers were doing their fragrant best to sweeten the air, while frogs croaked, birds whimpered and every living hidden thing poured out its soul in vesper greeting.

"Your Aunt Lottie died last month, didn't she?" finally asked Millie.

"Yes, and Hazel's mother, Aunt Harriet, is settling her affairs. You see, she lived with them."

"Is Hazel to go to school with you?"

"I'm afraid not. They built a new house and Aunt Lottie gave Hazel's share to them for that. But dad would never touch mine. You know how he works with this house. He just painted it all himself and, you know, Millie," Gloria's voice was affectionate, "you know, dad never did heavy work. He has always hoped to follow his calling, but I have held him here. Now, Millie, I am telling more than I planned, but I know I can depend upon you to keep it secret."

"Of course you can, Gloria. But I just hope you won't go."

"Don't you want me to grow up stylish, like Kathy?" teased Gloria.

"I don't want you to go away, and I don't want you to grow up like anyone but Gloria Doane," said Mildred fondly. "Now, I'll have to run. I promised Joe to help weed his garden and I've been out all afternoon. So-long, Glo! See you tomorrow."

"So-long, Millie," waved Gloria, for her chum was running off with her feet in one direction and her eyes in the other. Now she was looking back at Gloria Doane as she stood for a few moments under the big cedar tree.

Did Gloria want to leave all this? How peaceful and sweet it seemed now! But no idle dreamer was Gloria. With the first temptation to feel sorry for herself she called up the picture of her dad, Edward Doane, working at a bookkeeper's desk and dreaming of the great adventure. The young man made serious through sudden hardship—the loss of a lovely wife and the care of a darling daughter. This last would not have meant hardship, if only things had been different in Barbend. But here he had come in quest of the hoped-for health of an ailing wife. Here he had set up his humble home, and here he had still remained for Gloria's sake.

The girl and her dad were inseparable when he could be at home. He taught her more than she had learned from books, and the best of his gifts was a determination to overcome obstacles. When other girls of her age were suffering from the well meant shelter and warning of the home

circle, Gloria was absorbing the lessons of courage and determination. And now she was soon to see results. Her dad was going to have *his* chance. He was to be free from the care of a rather fractious daughter; he was to be unchained from the cottage that always needed a shingle or a daub of paint; he was to go on the trip that would pay its own way and take care of the explorer, while Gloria would be safely imprisoned in a boarding school. She thought of it that way. No love of culture nor hope of new adventure, even such as she had so long and so often read about, presented to her anything like a glowing picture of boarding school life. Kathy Bruen had done something to color up the prospect, but then there was Millie, and Tom, and even her faithful housekeeper and care-taker, Jane Morgan. Jane loved her and she was so faithful! Ever since Gloria could remember it had been Jane.

Jane's gray head made a second post at the gate just now. Gloria hurried on to answer the unspoken call to supper. Her father would not be home; he only came up the river twice a week in busy season and this was not his night.

"There's a letter for you, dear," said Jane,

with a smile that betrayed the possibility of good news.

"From Aunt Harriet?"

"Postmark's Sandford, so I guess it must be," said Jane, winding an arm around Gloria's waist as they both moved to the door.

"I'm getting so excited now I can hardly wait," said Gloria.

Jane threw her head up and turned away slightly, but not too secretly to betray a sigh of regret.

"Of course I hate to leave you, Nanty," said Gloria, using her pet name coined to be as near "aunty" as no such relationship might imply. "But then—it won't be for long."

"I know, Glory. It is going to be just beautiful for you and your dad. As far as I am concerned, I might as well confess, I am aching to get out to sister Mary's and have a close look at all the children she is constantly sending pictures of. Can't tell whether they're white or black, big or little, and as for knowing or guessing which is good or which is a rascal——" Jane stopped as if that were indeed too much even to guess at from the serial snap-shots sister Mary Murdock, of Logan Center, kept sending.

All during supper the two talked of the great prospects ahead, but for once Gloria did not read aloud her letter from Aunt Harriet. She had, however, read it over twice up in her room just before coming down to the table, and what she suspected the veiled references therein might mean, had by no means a pleasant outlook. Aunt Harriet wanted to know if Gloria could go out to her home in Sandford to talk over a matter without her father's knowledge. She also asked Gloria not to make any new plans until she had talked things over, "because," the letter stated, "there is something we must consider very seriously, and," said Aunt Harriet, "I hated to tell you about it before, so I just kept putting it off." Now that was like Aunt Harriet. She was plainly taking refuge in a foolish excuse, nevertheless that there was really something serious to be considered Gloria had not the slightest, not even the feeblest doubt. She wished she had. The hint was very dark and all black around the edges. Of course, being secret she would not consult the ever faithful Nanty, but without her dad and without her caretaker's confidence just now, the burden seemed rather heavy. And just when everything was so thrilling! So promising! It

couldn't be that something would prevent her going to boarding school after all her plans were made? And after her father was all ready to take the commission to go abroad on his long hoped-for enterprise?

"Let's go down to the post office," suggested Gloria suddenly, with a determined attempt to throw off the impending gloom. "It's wonderful out, Nanty, and I suppose you have been poking over that hot stove all afternoon."

Jane agreed. It was a wonderful evening and she always enjoyed a quiet walk after tea, with Gloria.

"Don't let's do anything until we get back," said the girl who was already slipping on a bright red sweater. "We can work after dark but we can't see the sunset then."

So it happened they met Tom Whitely coming toward their cottage. He was slicked up as he always was for evening, his very brown hair bubbling up in little curls in spite of all his troubles with it, and his fresh blue blouse showing his brown neck to advantage. The blue garment was sold as a blouse, his mother called it a waist, but Tom insisted that kind were shirts. He scorned anything else.

Seeing Jane, Tom wondered how he was going to get a word alone with Gloria. All three walked amiably along through the locust grove, but Tom did not appear to get much vim into his answers, and made no attempt at anything so positive as a question. He was very glum.

Finally, at Mrs. Mayhew's, Jane stopped. "Suppose you two go on," she said, "and I'll stop and talk to Clara. There she's alone on the porch, and I want to ask her something about apple jelly."

This gave Tom his chance.

CHAPTER IV

NANCY TRIVETT

"GLORIA," he began directly, tugging at her arm and glancing anxiously about, "Gloria, please take this money back."

"Why! Tom!"

"I'll tell you all about it when I get a chance." He was pressing the bills into her surprised hand. "I just couldn't keep it. I——" he faltered so miserably that Gloria almost laughed at his discomfiture.

"Is it haunted, Tom?" she teased. "Or is it poisoned?"

"Oh, I got into a row——"

Gloria rippled a laugh that frightened off a little pee-wee. "What ever do you mean, Tom? You got into a—row!"

"Say, Glo," the boy interrupted, finding her sweater pocket and hurriedly crushing into it the two bills, a two and a one, all folded up into a tiny square. "Listen. Old Nancy Trivett says

she lost three dollars in our store this morning, and Sam tipped me off not to give this to Abe Nash——"

"Oh, I see," said Gloria mercifully. "They are just mean enough to think a thing like that." She drew her mouth into a line that bulged at the corners. "I don't know which is the meanest, Abe or Nancy, but they're a pretty mean pair. I just wonder, Tom, why such folks always love to suspect us. They can't find enough of fault without making it up." Indignation was sending the girl's voice first up and then down until she seemed to be taking a breathing exercise. "I'd just like to fight it out with them for once. Why don't you do it, Tom?" she asked, excitedly.

"On account of mother. She just hates rows and can't even stand it when I scrap with the fellows," said Tom. "But gosh! I was thunderstruck!"

"She didn't say you took her mouldy old greenbacks!" exclaimed Gloria. "I'll bet they were mouldy too, just from her squeezing them, hating to part with the precious horde!"

They had walked along slowly but were now almost in the village. Persons were coming along, eagerly scanning such pieces of mail as make up the

evening delivery; post card and advertisements composing the best part of it, judging from the stray bits of paper carelessly discarded and sent fluttering about the street.

Emerging from the River Road, Gloria and Tom faced Main Street.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Tom. "If there ain't old Nance! Just let me duck!" and before Gloria could answer, the boy turned a corner and disappeared. But Nancy Trivett came straight for Gloria—head on!

"Where'd that young rowdy go?" demanded the irate woman, her voice as sharp as her unpleasant features.

Gloria did not deign to answer her. She attempted to pass on with her head higher than felt comfortable.

"I saw him!" continued the woman. "And I'll get him too. He needn't think he's goin' to get away with my hard earned money——"

"Mrs. Trivett, what are you talking about?" asked Gloria angrily. "Do you mean to say you think Tom Whitely took your money?"

"Oh, no; of course he didn't take it. He just *found* it——"

"He did not." If Gloria shrieked this reply

she had righteous indignation on her side. "Tom didn't find a cent."

"Abe Nash saw him have three dollars!"

The tirade had attracted so much attention that a small crowd was gathering. Anything for excitement in Barbend, but a clash between Nancy Trivett and Gloria Doane was particularly promising. Realizing her conspicuous position, but at the same time summoning her usual clear-headed courage to combat it, Gloria was secretly glad that Tommy escaped. He would never have been able to answer Nancy, and the crowd would be apt to jeer at a boy, at any boy against the spectacular Nancy. Just now she did look too funny! She wore the same hat she always appeared in, a black sailor, or one that had once been black, and this was festooned and decorated with feathers. flowers and ribbons, or bits of stuff that represented such decorations. Her dress was equally a mixture of useless odds and ends, all piled on, or plastered on at intervals from the neck to the jagged hem. It looked black but it should have been brown—that is the alpaca that composed the foundation for all the trimmings. But queerest of all was Nancy's own personality. She had red hair that "changeth not," and eyes of

no less permanency. They were a sort of hazel, and her complexion was not bad at all where it got a chance to show itself, but the strong sun and the rough weather do things to the complexion that goes with sandy hair and hazel eyes, and they did it unmercifully to Nancy's.

But her chiefest and most conspicuous feature was her hand bag. She carried it everywhere and never seemed to be without it. The bag was once brown leather but again time had collected its toll, and the bag looked now like something the rummage sale couldn't get rid of. It was large enough to carry a half dozen of eggs which Nancy often traded with the dealers for other commodities, and it was flat enough to go in her basket, and had a clasp! It was that clasp that fascinated Nancy.

All these details were as familiar to the Barbend folks as was Nancy herself, but while introducing her in her oddities, it is best to take a good look.

Gloria now confronted the woman with something of a scornful smile on her lips. She was so glad that Tommy did not have to answer that foolish accusation! Being a normal girl with a

sense of justice ever ready to assert itself, she felt at first very much inclined to tell the old-young lady just what she thought of her, but the small crowd just emerging from the post office were too plainly eager for a lark. Gloria was not quite good natured enough to satisfy them.

All this time Nancy kept talking. What she said did not matter in the least, her voice was so strident it supplied what her words might have lacked in the way of force.

"Say, Mrs. Trivett," said Gloria after a long wait filled with the other's cackling, "when and where did you lose that money?"

"Haven't I told you? I laid it right down on the basket of tomatoes——"

"Come on over to Sam's," suggested Gloria. "It might be stuck around——"

"Haven't I looked everywheres? Do you suppose I would go all day without that money that I had set aside for the fire insurance, if it was in Sam's store?"

Nevertheless, she followed Gloria. Only a dim light fell from a center lamp around the dingy place, but the baskets of vegetables were easily shifted. Gloria went to work with a will. Sam looked on indifferently, all he asked was that his

stuff be handled carefully. But the money did not come to light.

"What did you carry it in?" asked Gloria, as the next step in her systematic investigation.

"Why, in my bag, of course," replied Nancy, indignant that such a question should be put to her.

"Let's see it?" asked Gloria.

"Oh, see here!" and Nancy's indignation mounted. "Do you suppose I'm such a fool——"

"Never mind about that, Nancy," said Gloria evenly. "But just remember you have accused a boy of having that money. At least make sure you have searched thoroughly for it."

This argument was unanswerable, and Nancy opened the bag with the trick catch. She fumbled through a miscellaneous collection of articles and then looked up sharply.

"But just let me have a look," asked Gloria.

Reluctantly the bag was handed over. Gloria simply dumped the articles out into an empty berry basket, and with the refuse out of the way proceeded to look into the corners of the old hand satchel.

"You don't need to look——" interrupted the impatient woman. But Gloria kept right on looking.

Presently she felt a lump between the torn lining and the leather covering, and before Mrs. Nancy Trivett could offer any more protests Gloria held out to her the two crumpled bills.

"There you are," said Gloria simply, turning away without so much as noticing the other's gasping astonishment. She left her to return the trash to her bag and also to "fight it out with Sam."

Those faithful few who had "stuck around to see the finish" gloated over Gloria's triumph, but she did not so much as deign to answer Fred Ayres' question, who was really polite enough in putting it.

He just wanted to know where was Tommy Whitely.

The incident settled, Gloria had much more important matters to concern herself with. She might have a second letter from Aunt Harriet. The post office would close in five minutes and there was no time to lose in crossing the dusty street.

And there she found the second letter in her box. With it were cards and a letter from her dad. She had just time to put the Aunt Harriet

letter in her blouse when Jane appeared with others to mail for Mrs. Mayhew.

The flame of indignation lighted in Gloria's cheeks by Nancy Trivett, was now smoldering to a shadow of anxiety. It was never easy to understand the doings of Aunt Harriet. Gloria was so abstracted on the way home that gentle Jane decided she was sorry to leave Barbend. But the anxiety threatening came from a deeper source than mere girlish sentiment.

CHAPTER V

THE FORECAST

THE trip out to Sandford in the open trolley was bound to be either very pleasant or horrid. To-day it was horrid, for a light drizzle floated in, not heavy enough to demand that curtains be lowered and not light enough to be just damp. Gloria was going out to her Aunt Harriet's in response to the mysterious summons given in last night's letter.

There seemed to be many things mysterious lately about her aunt, but Gloria was determined that no unforeseen circumstance should come between her and her father's commission to the foreign port. From a small beginning Edward Doane had quickly made his worth known to the big firm he was employed by, and now the chance long hoped for had come, right alongside of the opportunity to accept it.

Gloria's education was to be assured, and with it that special care expected from such circum-

stances as a first class boarding school afforded. Because of the pronounced peculiarities of Gloria's Aunt Harriet, her father had not interfered with any matters concerning his wife's relatives, and even the loved Aunt Lottie had been very gently refused when she had asked him to act as one of the two executors of her estate.

Gloria did not know of the request. She only knew that her Aunt Harriet and some strange man had been put in charge, and she was too delicately sensitive about the whole situation to ask any direct questions.

There had been unexpected delays about the settlement, but these Gloria condoned with the assurance to her father that with Aunt Harriet and Hazel everything would be all right, and so she insisted he was to finish up all his business and leave the details of hers to those just mentioned.

The few passengers on the jerky trolley were taking their leave of each other as the trip to Sandford lengthened, but Gloria had to ride to the Green, then transfer to Oakley. The misty rain was collecting stringy little drops when she alighted behind a rattling old farm wagon, and when it passed and she emerged from her hiding

place, she almost ran into the arms of a girl crossing toward her.

"Oh, hello, Gloria!" greeted the girl with the wonderful smile. "Whatever are you doing out here?"

"Hello, Trix," called back Gloria, succumbing to the ready grasp of her friend's hand upon her arm. "I'm bound for Aunt Harriet's——"

"Oh, of course," interrupted Trix Travers. "Thought maybe you were out for the postponed tennis match. It isn't. Did you ever see such a mean day?"

The two were upon the sidewalk now, Trix affably abandoning her evident way to the north while she traveled south with Gloria. She was older than Gloria but had that encompassing way about her that always swept folks off their feet and into her graces. Even the tennis racket under her arm had no cause to complain that it was being disappointed in a possible victory, for Trixy held it fondly and found no fault herself. The girls chatted as they walked, Trixy told Gloria of her cousin Hazel's try "in the tournament" and hinted of her ambitions to make the team at "her school," but Gloria was prudently impersonal, and only said how fine tennis was, and how she

wished the girls at Barbend would get up a club.

"You babes," teased Trixy, "better be playing bean-bag. It's safer." Her sally was a compliment, the smile and tone completely belying her words.

Presently a little roadster swung up to the curb and a young man, after greeting Trixy, asked if he could not give them a lift. It was while driving out to Oakland that Gloria tried to vision herself in these new surroundings permanently. The town was so unlike Barbend—a newly built place with everything glowing and shining and threatening to break out over night in further improvements. There was a hum and a din, but no moan of the water bending over the bar, and no call of the kingfishers' tallying their catches from the lake or river.

And how would Tommy compare with this artless Hal Caldwell? Of course Hal was older, but would Tommy ever get to be like that? The capable little car buzzed along. Trixy chatted first into Gloria's ear then over the wheel into Hal's. Every one on the way bowed, smiled or called out pleasantly, and while the ride was only a short one it seemed to Gloria to typify life in Sandford.

They left her in front of her Aunt Harriet's new cottage, and Trixy wanted Gloria to promise she would call her up on the 'phone before she left town. Trixy Travers was the sort of girl who makes friends as readily as she smiles, and who keeps them without any more apparent effort.

But whatever happened within the cottage between Gloria and her Aunt Harriet it seemed to take all the glow out of the girl's face, and to put more gleam into her dark eyes. She did not wait to see Hazel later, instead, she walked away quickly, not even waiting for the little "jigger" that would have taken her to the regular trolley. Had Trixy Travers happened to meet her on the return trip, perhaps even her winning smile might not have been able to penetrate Gloria's clouds.

The rain had stopped and it was late afternoon. A repressed sunset was apologizing for the other dismal outlines of a jaded world, but none of this diverted the young girl under the linen hat that shaded little wisps of curls making tendrils to border the pretty face. It was pretty even in its sadness.

Tommy happened to be at the square when her car rumbled in. She tried to avoid him but he

waited for her, his own face aglow with some good news.

"I made it!" he exclaimed. "I made the extra three dollars."

"Oh, that's good." Gloria jerked her mind back to the disabled bicycle and smiled.

"Yep, I ran the launch all afternoon and Pop Sargeant gave me the dollar he's been owing me so long."

"That's fine," said Gloria abstractedly.

"And what do you think?" went on Tommy. "Old lady Trivett made mother a present of a horse-shoe geranium, the kind ma always admired."

"She never!" exclaimed Gloria.

"Sure did," insisted Tom. "We were awfully surprised."

"I should think you would be," agreed Gloria. She and Tom were leaving the village behind them and wending their way homeward.

"I tell you, Tom," mused Gloria. "I guess poor old Nancy felt sorry for being so—so hasty. You can't always judge folks, can you?"

"No. Ma said she'd rather have that potted slip all ready for the winter, you know, than most anything else."

"So, see what your wheel spill did after all." Gloria laughed lightly—rather too lightly for Gloria. "That geranium's what they call a conscience gift, I guess," she continued. "You know how Walter Garrabrant sent a dollar to the trolley company last year?"

"Yes, but that seemed foolish," replied Tom. "If he stole rides he didn't use any extra power."

"Tom Whitely! I'm ashamed of you!" declared Gloria. "Of course the trolley company can't be robbed any more than other folks. I believe the very meanest feeling must be that of taking and keeping something belonging to someone else." She shuddered so that Tom looked up queerly.

"What's the matter, Glo? Did you have any trouble out to your aunt's?"

"Why no. Of course not," said Gloria quickly.

"How's your cousin with the red hair?"

"Look out who you're calling a red head, Tom Whitely," charged Gloria, "I can't see that your own head is exactly black."

"'Tisn't as carroty as hers," retorted Tom. "Well, how is the girl with the golden locks? If you like that better."

"I didn't see Hazel," replied Gloria indif-

ferently. Then hurried to talk of something else. "Tom," she said suddenly, "I guess I'll have time to go over and see the peace offering. Jane doesn't expect me till the six o'clock car."

"And Mumsey will be glad to see you, Glo," responded the boy, brightly. "She said this morning you were scarcer than hen's teeth."

"I don't like to be compared with hen's teeth, but since there isn't any such thing perhaps I'll forgive you. How's all the bruises?"

"Turning green and mother says that's the last stage. But no fooling, that old arm is stiff." He demonstrated with a couple of easy exercises and even winced at those.

"Get the wheel?"

"I wouldn't take it. The chain rattled like a flivver. There's mother fetching in kindling. I thought I left enough for a week," and before Gloria had time to reply Tom was off to relieve the mother of her kindling basket.

Amid praise and good wishes for Nancy Trivett the rose geranium was presently exhibited.

"You can't always tell the difference between a wasp and a bee," said Mrs. Whitely. "Both buzz a lot but only one poisons."

"Well, Nancy is more the wasp——"

"Tommy-lad! You hush!" ordered the mother. "Nancy Trivett leads a lonely life——"

"Moth-er!" mocked Tom. "As if any one could be lonesome with those geese, chickens and——"

But the mother shooed the irrepressible Tom clear off the porch before he could further tell of Nancy Trivett's diversions.

"I heard Sally Hinds say the new teachers were to board at Blains," said Mrs. Whitely, while Tom remained at a safe distance.

"Yes?" said Gloria.

"What's the matter, child? You don't seem a bit like yourself," remarked Mrs. Whitely, noting Gloria's abstraction.

"I'm just tired," replied the girl, avoiding those eyes so like Tom's in their kind scrutiny. "And you see—I'm not going to Barbend school next term."

Then in snatches and exclamations, the prospect of Gloria's change of school, change of home life and change, perhaps, of acquaintance was talked of. But somehow Gloria could not respond to her friend's sympathetic eagerness.

Tom went for Higgins' cows while the way to the Doane's cottage was traversed, but before they had reached the lane where Gloria should have

parted with her companion, she suddenly jerked out a queer "S'long!" and raced off leaving Tom with his mouth open wider than his eyes.

This was a new Gloria.

CHAPTER VI

AT TURTLE COVE

Busy days followed. There was so much to do before Gloria should leave home and before her father should go on his extended trip, that it took the combined energies of Jane and Gloria, to say nothing of help offered by Millie, to get things into order for the important events.

But all preparations were halted when her dad came home, for he at once planned a picnic and ordered his daughter to gather her friends for the festivity.

As a father Edward Doane was disappointing to strangers. He was in no way old, did not have a visible gray hair, he was not fat, nor funny, did not wear glasses, and as a widower he failed utterly to mope and lament. Instead, he was an attractive young man who had more than once been taken for Gloria's big brother. But in spite of their close companionship, Gloria was the most devoted daughter and the best little business

partner one would hope to find in all Barbend. Their companionship was doubly dear, as the loss of her mother left Gloria so much to the care of her young father, and perhaps it was the similarity of dispositions that gave each so complete an understanding of the other.

When he was at home Gloria could do nothing but enjoy his company, and now even the temporary breaking up of her home did not debar her from this coveted pleasure.

Millie and Tom helped distribute the picnic invitations, Mr. Doane insisted that every one who could be piled into the Finnan-Laddie be asked, and when Saturday afternoon came it brought with it exquisite sunshine from a sapphire sky that belongs distinctly to the early autumn.

Jane-the-wonderful did up the lunch. She insisted it be carried in her second sized bread box, as that would surely be impervious to sunshine, engine heat and dampness. The lemon juice was stored in patent topped soda bottles, and because Tom insisted the boys should fetch something, he carried to the launch the most precious prize of all: a packed container of real store ice cream, and Jerry Mack carried the dozen cones to dish it into. Only Mr. Doane knew of this treat, as

Tom and Jerry "made it up" and the other four boys chipped in.

When Millie checked up her list of guests it included besides herself and Gloria, Margie Trebold, Grace Ayres, Nettie Leonard and Blanche Richmond. On Tom's list were besides Jerry and himself, Arthur Williams, George Alton, Ranny Blake, Ralph Dana and little Neddie Mack, Jerry's irrepressible brother, who had to go or Jerry would have had to stay away "to mind him."

Mr. Doane ran the launch, of course, and on the way over to the cove the children sang, shouted, yelled and did everything that youngsters usually do when turned loose for a good time. Neddie required considerable cautioning about leaning over to trail his very small fingers through the waves left in the boat's track, but Gloria loved him, she "adored his kinky curls," and she didn't mind in the least his irresponsible lollypop that now and then would brush her sleeve.

Tom crouched up front with the skipper, and not a turn of the engine but he checked up with a smile, if not with an outright grin. He loved this boat—it was the pride of the lake, and not often did the little ones get a chance to enjoy it. Mr. Doane was plainly very fond of the boys who

paid him homage outright—no king on his throne could have received more flagrant tribute.

The girls naturally gave color to the party. They wore their brightest if not their newest, sweaters, and the prospect of romping in the woods suggested skirts not easily affected by brush or briar.

It was a wonderful sail. The lake was lined with jagged trees, and the deep green of cedars and hemlock sent the softest shadows along the water's edge.

Tom had told Mr. Doane privately that the ice cream cones would have to be served at once or drank from cups, so that the usual planting of a stake to make their landing, was delayed until after the treat had been administered.

"Tom Whitely!" exclaimed Gloria when she beheld with surprise, Tom and his box of cream, and Jerry with the row of cones all set up in the long cover of a paste-board box so that the "dishing" might be exactly even. "However did you manage——"

"Eat, lady, eat," cautioned Tom. "This isn't any pie imitation, it's the real thing. Hey, there, Ranny! hand these out. Jerry's rack is a bit wobbly."

"The best I ever tasted!" declared Millie, who ate cream in spite of her fear of fat. "You boys are just—just fine!" she insisted.

Gloria was seeing to it that Neddie got his cone. Her solicitude was really not necessary, Neddie being more apt to get more than his share than to be neglected, but her devotion to the small boy helped her to cover other emotions, and her companions, noticing her strange manner, naturally ascribed it to threatening homesickness.

"Mr. Doane," called Grace Ayres, she with the lovely, long brown braids and two active dimples, "I think you should have two cones. You are the guest of honor."

"Count 'em out first," called back the man who was still doing something to the engine. "I like cones but I could get along with the regular allowance."

Tom took personal care of this serving, stepping gingerly over the boat's edge and offering the rather liquid little portion to Mr. Doane.

"Well, I'll say this is a treat," declared the boat's captain, dropping the screw driver and taking his place on Gloria's cushion—the one she always insisted he make himself comfortable on. Tom had his own cone in the other hand, and with

a show of importance rather unlike Tom, he squatted down beside the captain.

"We're awfully sorry Gloria's going away," he said quietly. "She and I've been chums ever since we lived in the quarry house."

"Yes," said Mr. Doane, "you have, Tom, and I know you will miss Gloria." He paused with his cone half way to his lips. For a few moments neither spoke, then the father continued: "I hate to think of letting her go, but it was her mother's wish that she be educated at that seminary. She just couldn't go—before."

"Oh, I know," replied Tom. "It's the best thing, of course, and it'll do her a lot of good." Tom's words were meaningless to him but he felt he had to say something. As a matter of fact he had not the slightest idea what a boarding school was intended to do for its pupils. He had not even read a story with a boarding school girl mentioned in it. His stories were built upon sterner lines.

Clamoring for their leader, the children upon the shore would have presently re-embarked if Tom and Mr. Doane had not met their demands to "Come ashore." Every one seemed to have a separate and individual plan for the afternoon's

enjoyment, but that which included a preliminary hike to the top of the hill was decided upon by a majority vote.

"Who's going to watch the grub can?" asked Jerry Mack. He felt himself to be provision custodian. Didn't Jane tell him not to let any one take the lid off that box until Gloria said so?

"That'll be all right," answered Ranny Blake, quite out of order.

"Nobody's around here," chimed in Neddie Mack, sending a searching eye up and down the beach.

"We'll just cover things up and forget them," suggested Mr. Doane. "When we come back we'll be hungry enough to eat the screw driver."

This brought forth a shout from the boys, but the girls were already starting up the hill in that precise, deliberate way girls have of doing things when boys are in the party.

But there was nothing self conscious about the followers of Mr. Doane. The boys looked up to him as if he were a veritable miracle man; they repeated his words, they openly jostled each other for the coveted place nearest him, and Jerry, being really quite a talker, received a jab from Tom's bare elbow, at regular intervals.

"When I was a boy I lived in the city," Mr. Doane would say. Whereat his listeners would know of so many others who "lived in the city" that the proposed story would flutter away on the wings of a hearty laugh.

"But there's nothing like the great outdoors to give fellows muscle——"

"I'm goin' to take boxin' lessons," put in Jerry eagerly, but the jeers and groans from his companions offered very slight encouragement for such an undertaking.

"I've got the gloves," he declared. "An' can't a feller put on weight boxin', Mr. Doane?"

"Skin—nay!" retorted Ranny Blake.

"You ought to get enough exercise around here without putting on the gloves, Jerry," said Mr. Doane kindly. As a matter of fact any one would have suggested the rest cure to put flesh on the thinnest boy in the crowd.

But the mention of athletics uncorked the most popular topic for male consideration, and in spite of the great outdoors all around them—the greatest kind of a day and the most perfect piece of rural scenery all the way up the hill, even over the county landmark, a huge boulder that was painted

white and shone for miles around—every step and mis-step of the way the boys talked of sports. Boxing, baseball, skating, football and every other line of amateur and professional activity was discussed fully and enthusiastically, Mr. Doane acting as referee and umpiring the "meet" and its distant prospects.

The girls were gathering wild asters, golden rod and sweet fern. They romped about now with little Neddie as an excuse, hiding from him, teasing him with Indian calls and animal imitations, although Neddie was only tolerating their excessive attention.

"Come on and be Peter Pan," suggested Gloria while she and Millie "boosted" the small boy into a dogwood tree.

This gave the embarrassed youngster his chance. The tree was heavy enough to climb and climb it he did, never pausing until he reached a perfectly safe perch far from the reach of mere girls.

"You'll fall!" shouted Gloria.

"That limb is bending!" warned Grace.

"Come down, Neddie, the boys are going snake hunting," tempted Millie.

But Neddie hugged a branch and swung on his limb in such a reckless fashion that Margie suggested making a life net.

How could they know how much a boy hates to be fussed over? Gloria was enough fusser, but when the others all piled in he felt like the prize baby at the Cattle Show—the one that was weighed right before everybody.

Jerry was so glad to be free of the small brother he would not have cared if the climb went still higher, but when Mr. Doane held out his strong arms, down came the little Peter Pan ker-plunk! He had no intention of missing the snake hunt.

"Come along, girls," called out Mr. Doane when the petulant Peter Pan had been once more disposed of. "If you don't want to hunt snakes make it b'ars! Big black woolly ones, that old Sam Sykes is always insisting he used to chum with up in this baby mountain. Gloria, you know the worn trail, but don't get out of speaking distance. We boys will head for the first slant, over toward the big tree, and if we don't find snakes, or bears——"

"We'll find deers," shouted Jerry, ignoring the regular way of making the plural. "Nort Sloane saw a deer up here last week!"

"All right," laughed Mr. Doane. "Snakes, b'ars or deer, all the same to the hunters. But don't use sling-shots, now, boys," as Ralph and George examined a suspicious bit of string. "Sling-shots are not safe in mixed company."

So the hunt for wild animals began.

CHAPTER VII

THE HUNT

"Oh! Come here, quick!" yelled Ranny, in tones that made the others respond promptly.

"What is it?" demanded Tom.

"A wild animal!" shouted back Ranny.

"Whereabouts?" asked Jerry, the fearless.

"He's—he's behind that—rock!" panted Ranny, pointing to a huge boulder that in size almost matched the county landmark.

"Got—got anything—to get—him with?" gasped Arthur Williams, creeping up toward the path-finder Ranny, but managing to keep pretty well behind him.

"Don't make any noise," cautioned Ranny. "I saw him first near the spring, and when I whistled——! Sh-s-s-h!" came the sibilant warning. "I saw—him—move!"

Two or three steps over the crunching brush and the boys made a sudden plunge to get under

cover—of anything. An object had moved! It sounded like a small animal and it moved in bounds and leaps. By this time the remainder of the hiking party realized something new was in prospect. Mr. Doane was with the girls, who had insisted upon obtaining some perilously perched wild columbine, while the remainder of the boys were scattered about near Moon Rock. But now there was a sudden change of base, and the squad presented battle formation at the trunk of the biggest and roundest tree.

There was no need for explanation. The secret signal that shouts danger, was bristling from the red hair of Tommy, and from the black curls of Neddie, and every little gasp of the others fairly echoed to the four ends of the earth, in the silent language of hikers.

"There he goes!" breathed Tom, as something went from the oak to the button-ball tree. But it did not fully come out into view, there was merely a flash of soft color seen to dart among the green.

"Yep! It's a deer!" confirmed Ralph Dana, although he could not possibly have seen even the flash from his hiding place.

"Don't make any noise! They're awfully

scared," said Jerry, while his own cautious movements seemed to make more noise than the combined shifting of all the others.

"Let's get sticks," suggested George Alton.

"What for?" demanded the path-finder Ranny.

"To beat the brush down——"

"Think a deer would hide under brush?" came the derisive query of Tom.

"Naw, o' course he wouldn't," scoffed Jerry. "They run like anything if you only—only shake a stick at them."

"Sure. They're the scariest animals they is," said little Neddie, glad to be in the deer hunt in lieu of the snake chase.

"There he goes again!" called out Arthur Williams, now openly defying orders to keep quiet.

Something very nimble, indeed, leaped over a few more stones; but as before succeeded in hiding its real identity.

The boys stood breathless. This creature was surely a rare animal, and it came to the mind of more than one boy that it would be greatly to their credit if they could capture it single handed, without the aid of Mr. Doane.

"Who's got the rope?" demanded Jerry, send-

ing a scathing look over those companions within his range.

Hands went down into incompetent pockets, and into blouse depths but none fetched up a coil of rope suitable for lassoing.

"Of course, we didn't bring any," again growled Jerry.

"Of course not," echoed Arthur Williams.

"I could lasso him just as easy——"

"Sure we could," confirmed Tom.

"Sure!" went down the line till Neddie swallowed it.

"Well, we got to do something! Look! There he goes! The son-of-a-gun!" groaned Arthur.

"Into the cave!" gasped Ralph.

"Gone!" sighed Tom, except that the sigh was somewhat like a gasp.

Their concentration had attracted the attention of the columbine hunters, and now the girls, with Mr. Doane, came as quickly through the wood as the deep underbrush would allow.

Signs and wig-wags warned them not to speak, but of course Millie had to giggle. A "Sh-s-s-h!" from Tom brought Gloria up so suddenly that she all but fell headlong into a nest of briars.

"What—is it?" whispered Grace Ayres.

"Somethin'," admitted Neddie, rebelling against the tight squeeze Ranny was holding him in with.

Mr. Doane somehow took in the situation without any explanation. Perhaps that was because he had been a boy not so very long before, and he could easily guess what hunters are apt to come upon in Turtle Cove Woods.

"He's in there," ventured Ranny, pointing to the hole in the rocks which had swallowed up the prize.

"Big?" asked Mr. Doane.

"You bet!" replied Tom. "He looks like a deer."

"We'll get him," boasted the man with such a look of courage and determination that every boy was at once his slave with renewed, if unspoken, allegiance.

"A rope," suggested Jerry crisply.

"You bet, old man," agreed Mr. Doane. "We have one in the boat——"

"I'll get it," offered Arthur, but perhaps Tom thought of the lunch box, for he turned and ran along with the first messenger.

They had not yet reached the launch when a

hail from Jerry brought them both to a standstill.

"Hey, wait!" he yelled, but they paid no heed to the order, for at any moment that animal might dash out of the cave and get away.

Tom climbed into the boat and Arthur followed.

"I saw the rope here——" began Tom, but Jerry was now climbing in and still saying something.

"A sandwich!" he finally managed to exclaim. "They want a sandwich."

"I guess you won't have any sandwich," declared Tom, not in the most amiable tones.

"They want it!"

"What for?" demanded Arthur.

"For the deer," replied the impatient Jerry.

"A sandwich—for—a deer!" gasped Tom, pausing with a cushion in one hand and a life preserver in the other.

"Sure," snarled Jerry. "Did you think I wanted it for myself?"

"We didn't know," said Tom, "but no one gets anything out of that box——"

"Oh, hey!" snarled Jerry. "Can't you see anything? Mr. Doane wants to bait the deer

with it." His tone was scornful enough to poison the very atmosphere.

"Well, I'll get one," finally condescended Tom.

"Glo told *me* to get it," insisted the annoyed Jerry, climbing over his two companions and making his way up to the big blanket that covered the bread box.

Both boys stopped in the rope hunt to watch him.

"Be careful," ordered Tom. "They're each wrapped in wax paper."

"I know," retorted Jerry, who now actually had hold of one of the precious sandwiches and was shutting the box.

"One's enough," said Arthur, foolishly.

"You don't need to think I'm cribbin'."

"Oh, come along," called Tom, who had procured the rope and was scrambling out with it. "Think a wild deer is going to wait all day?"

They didn't, evidently, for Jerry held the sandwich in both hands and followed his companions up the hill, there to find the others still waiting anxiously, lined up like a guard of honor on each side of the cave.

More signs and wig-wagging, but few words were used in giving the directions necessary to

lay the trap and bait it with one of Jane's best corn beef sandwiches—it was in the lightest brown paper outside the inside wax paper, so that was sure to be corn beef.

Tom laid the rope in a ring just at the opening of the rocks as Mr. Doane directed, then Jerry very carefully placed the unwrapped sandwich right in the very center, and the two most important actors stepped back in line with the others.

They waited.

Mildred giggled.

Gloria almost choked.

"Your red sweater!" hissed Ranny. "They're afraid of red."

Mr. Doane agreed without saying so, but he looked so intelligently at Gloria that she crept back of him to hide her sweater and—her laugh.

"I see—him! Here he comes!" gasped little Neddie, and before any one could even say "So he does!" something sprang out from the rocks!

"Mrs. Higgins' Nanny!"

This was announced by so many that it doesn't really matter who is credited with the identification, for the pretty deer-like, faun-colored goat deliberately gulped down the corn beef sandwich,

while Ranny pulled the rope and captured the "wild animal."

"Poor Mrs. Higgins has been looking for Nanny for two whole days——" said Gloria ruefully.

"She'll have her to-night," replied Mr. Doane. "But go easy with the rope, Ranny, and let the poor creature finish up the paper."

"They love it," added Blanche without a trace of disappointment in her voice. What's a deer or a goat to animal hunters? Besides, Mrs. Higgins sold the goat's milk to a delicate old lady who believed it had health value—every one knew that.

"We'll tie her to a tree and eat our lunch," suggested Mr. Doane, and the way that order was carried out left no suspicion of poor health demanding goat's milk among any of those present.

But Nanny wasn't home yet, and it was quite a sail over the tranquil waters, back to Barbend.

CHAPTER VIII

NANNY'S RETURN

GREATLY as they enjoyed the feast, and what is greater than a feast on the shores of a lake on a perfect autumn evening—still, the thrill of adventure enshrouded that little goat.

Mr. Doane did not give orders. He was one of those charming men who would not interfere with children's plans unless he felt obliged to do so through some safety measure, so now, as each planned and the other contradicted as to the best method of getting Nanny across the lake and back to her little shed among Mrs. Higgins' lima bean poles, Mr. Doane just ate his sandwiches and drank his lemonade as any guest of honor should have done.

"Let me tell you! Hey, listen a minute!" begged Tom. He was copying Mr. Doane's manner in a sort of aloofness until now. "I *know* a goat can swim——"

"But not so far," interrupted Mr. Doane.

"Oh, well, maybe," acceded Tom. "But anyway, we don't have to take her in the launch——"

"I should say not!" cried out Gloria, while the other girls gathered in their scant skirts apprehensively.

"'Course you don't have to take her in the launch," echoed George Alton, who was the best "echoer" in the party, but never seemed able to send out an original suggestion.

"She could float," lisped Neddie, trying to take care of his own sandwich, while he ate the one Ranny gave him.

They were too busy thinking to laugh. The goat must be brought back to Barbend, but how?

"A raft!" exclaimed Tom, who had considered and disregarded almost every other craft for the visiting goat.

"That's it," replied Mr. Doane, smiling broadly. "I was just waiting to see if any scout would think of that."

"Sure, that's it, a raft," repeated Jerry quite as if he had been waiting to give out the information. "We can make it—easy."

"How?" asked Ranny. He had not complete faith in Jerry's ideas.

"We've got hammer and nails and that's heaps

more than scouts generally have to start with," said Mr. Doane.

"It seems to me that this is pretty much a boys' party," remarked Gloria. She had sprinkled the flowers with lake water, and refused to let Neddie feed the goat any more of their sweet-flag root. After all, it did seem that boys knew best how to have a good time in the woods.

"Why, Gloria!——" her father exclaimed under his breath. "Haven't you been having a good time?"

"Oh, of course, daddy, but the boys have climbed trees——"

"I thought I saw you up a tree——"

"Oh, that! That was only a little birch, and Mildred wanted a big branch to chew on," replied Gloria. She was sunburned from the water's sun and her hair was flying wildly about her head. Her red sweater "had whiskers on it," as some one had remarked, for briars and brambles can pull a sweater pretty well apart. Still, she must have enjoyed herself, although there was that far-away look in her dark eyes, and often when the others were too busy to notice, she would gaze steadily at her father and seem to study anew his loved personality.

Now the girls took exception to her complaint of the afternoon's pleasure, and each tried to outdo the other in declaring they had had simply a wonderful time.

Getting the raft made and putting the surprised goat upon it caused considerable excitement. But it was finally accomplished, and when the last knot was tied as gently as Tom could tie it, and the little animal lay helpless, her full faun-colored length upon the rough woods' timber, Gloria said it reminded her of the Bible pictures of Abraham's sacrifice.

"All aboard!" called out Mr. Doane. "I've promised to get you youngsters home before supper time, and just look at that sun!"

"Couldn't I get a couple more white stones?" begged Neddie.

"You've got plenty of stones," scoffed his brother Jerry. "And what won't mother do to you for stuffin' them in that good blouse?"

The trophies of the hunt were not as varied as usual, as Mrs. Higgins' goat had taken up a lot of time, but then, it was a real find, and now as the launch started off, the boys were simply gasping with the excitement of "draggin' home the prey."

"We'll go as smoothly as we can," announced Mr. Doane, "for poor old Nanny won't know exactly what to make of her sail."

"But she isn't kickin'," declared Ranny. "I thought she'd kick like a steer.

"Why, Ranny Blake!" scoffed Mildred. "How could she kick with her feet tied?"

"I mean—wiggle them," corrected Ranny.

"She does take it all right," remarked Tom, who had given up his seat in the bow to keep a hand on the rope that trailed from the stern.

No hunters from the wilds ever returned with more precious spoils than Nanny constituted, as she lay quite contentedly upon her rugged raft. And in spite of Gloria's comment, that the party had been mostly for boys, the girls were now as eager and enthusiastic over the capture as were their sterner companions.

Crossing the lake took but a few minutes—less than half an hour really, and once upon the home shore there was an exciting time deciding just who would bring to Mrs. Higgins her errant goat.

A wreath of wild flowers had been woven by the girls on the trip across, and this looked very festive indeed upon the neck of the prodigal.

Besides this, her reins were interwoven with sprays and sprigs of foliage, so that her return was marked with gaiety and glamor, when Neddie drummed on a tin pan and Arthur piped on a squeaky tin whistle, as the march towards home-quarters was finally under way.

"It isn't far, let's all go," proposed Blanche when the escort was discussed, and there being no dissenting vote her plan was unanimously adopted.

Mr. Doane laughed heartily as his little guests started off. He was delighted that Gloria had made so many friends in her home town, and while he may have feared the effects of new surroundings upon his brave, if self-willed, daughter—he was too anxious to get away and make brighter prospects for her, to entertain doubts of the ultimate success of his plan.

The last of the marchers had turned the corner before he covered up the engine of the Finnan-Laddie, and a shout from some of the boys sent back a distant report of the triumphal advance.

Over on the back road the youngsters were leading Nanny. She took it all so indifferently. In fact, the fragrant wreath upon her neck and

the nice cool leaves brushing her slender sides seemed to please, rather than to trouble, the queen goat.

Mrs. Higgins, fat and good-natured, was at the gate as they came up the lane.

"My land of the livin'! What's that!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"Your goat," yelled a chorus.

"We found her——"

"Nope, we hunted her——"

"Listen, Mrs. Higgins, we trapped her——"

"Oh say! Can't you tell a story straight? Mrs. Higgins, we lassoed her——"

Each of the boys responsible for one of these outbursts now stood wondering why Mrs. Higgins did not respond. She had not taken a single step forward to welcome her retrieved goat.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Higgins?" asked Gloria. "Aren't you glad to get her back?"

The jovial Irish face wrinkled into a smile of the one piece pattern. "I was always fond of old Nanny," said the woman, "but I sold her to Tom Sykes and here you fetched her back——" She broke into a laugh that began at her toes and surged over her generous form like a merry little earthquake.

"Oh!" sighed the children, crestfallen. Nanny bleated expectantly.

"We can never take her back," began Gloria seriously. "It was some trouble, we'll say, to get her over here."

"Sure, you couldn't take her back," agreed Mrs. Higgins, advancing now to welcome the wayfarer. "And isn't she pretty?" She patted the wreath and Nanny kissed her familiar hand. "I'll bet old Sykes starved you——"

"He did," declared Jerry. "We've been feedin' her all afternoon."

"Look at that now! I'm sure you were generous to her and gave her a fine picnic." The goat seemed anxious to chew up the gingham apron in spite of all that, but Mrs. Higgins took the festive reins and directed the steed toward the side path that led to the barn.

"I'll tell you, children," she addressed the entire party, "I'm real glad to get her back. There's Becky Nolan who thinks she's on the road to Heaven daily, if she hasn't a pint of goat's milk." Seeing the joke in this remark, Mrs. Higgins explained that Becky was normally always on the road to Heaven, but she didn't want to shorten the journey. The girls

laughed but the boys were waiting for Mrs. Higgins to finish her announcement. Plainly there was a promise in her voice.

"Soon as I tie her up I'll give every one of you a nice, big bunch of grapes," came the generous offer. "And Tom Whitely, be sure you ask me for two. I want to send one to your ma."

"Yes'm," said Tom.

And Nanny bleated a beautifully tuneful, long, echoing call.

She must have been very glad indeed to get back to her own little shed under the lima bean poles.

She was mocking Tom Sykes.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE'S GOLDEN SHADOWS

Now that she was face to face with her daring plan, Gloria was frightened at its magnitude.

"But dad has got to go," she kept reminding herself, "and that is the only thing that really matters."

Circumstances favored her strategy; that far-away look in her dark eyes was but the sign of her otherwise hidden anxiety, all the unaccountable gloom and forecast of homesickness that so strangely enveloped Gloria since that afternoon visit to her Aunt Harriet's home, was now coming to a crisis, and in the few days that remained before she should leave her Barbend home, the little girl so lately a care-free youngster, was suddenly grown up, with the responsibility of keen, poignant anxiety.

She could not possibly confide in Jane, for Jane would have opposed her out of sheer loving kindness. And Gloria had to use the utmost caution

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to keep her dad from suspecting the merest hint of her actual plan; of her other friends Tom was not wise enough, neither was Millie, therefore she simply had to fight it out alone.

Two days after the launch picnic a telegram from the New York office notified Mr. Doane of an earlier sailing than he was prepared for. He was at home arranging for the renting of their little house, all furnished, to a reliable family who wanted to try a winter at the beach. Benjamin Hardy and his wife Margaret seemed to live for the pleasure they gave and received to and from their son Benjamin, Junior. This son was a nature student; he wanted to stay by the ocean for a wild, blustery winter, and the Doane cottage situated far enough inland to be comfortable and far enough out to be picturesque, suited Mr. and Mrs. Hardy and the son, perfectly.

Mr. Doane hardly knew how to tell Gloria that he had to leave her before the time originally arranged, but when he romped off to the orchard and she followed, helped her to spring up into her childhook nook in the big bulky apple tree, then he attempted to break the news.

"I know it's a shame," he said contritely, "but

the old boat is going to toot off two days ahead of time."

"Oh, that's all right, dad," replied Gloria brightly.

He looked at her in perplexity. "Not really anxious to get rid of the old bear——"

"Daddy-Kins!" And she fell from the tree into his arms. "You know every minute will be an hour and every hour a day——"

"I know, darling," he assured her, embracing her fondly, "but I can't help being jealous of the new folks. Sure you are going to like it all?"

"Why, Daddy Doane——"

"Because I've left it all to you and faithful Jane and your Aunt Hattie," he continued. "I know they'll take care of you, for there's their own girl only two years older. But you see, girlie, you and I have been such cast iron pals."

They were now both sitting on a log—the apple tree cut down last year—and about them the twilight etched pictures in shadowy outlines. Gloria clung to her father with pathetic tenderness, yet, when he said he must go earlier a look of relief seemed to flash across her serious young face.

"I know how it is, little girl," he ruminated.

"When you have to do a very hard thing you like to get it done with——"

"That's it," she sighed. "I have always felt that funerals would be easier to bear if folks didn't think about them for day's ahead——"

"Funerals!"

She laughed—she felt obliged to. Why had she said such a morbid thing as that?

"Oh, you know, dad, I'm just silly. The worst thing just now is that you and I are going—to—separate, and the other worst thing is always—that." She struggled to explain.

"I know, sweetheart, I know." A father can be so understanding.

For some moments they sat there not even breaking their sanctuary with an audible sigh, then Jane's voice aroused them and they went back to see about locking the store room.

The very next day he was gone!

And a crumpled little heap of palpitating sorrow was Gloria Doane!

"Don't mind me, Jane, please don't mind me," she wailed, "I've just got—to cry—or I'll choke!" she sobbed, shaking and shuddering in her grief as if the torrent would never leave her until it had consumed every ray of happiness hidden in

the most secret recesses of her throbbing heart.

"But you'll make yourself ill," murmured Jane. "If your father knew you were going to take it like this——"

"Jane, listen!" and Gloria struggled bravely with the torrent of grief. "My father has sacrificed so much for me. Ever since he has been old enough to know what he wanted, he couldn't have it." She paused to choke back tears. "And I have been determined ever since *I* could know what—I wanted, that he should have his chance." Her voice rang out with heroic determination.

Jane gazed in wonder at the girl so lately her baby-charge, her little wild flower Gloria! But she did not interrupt.

"And now he's gone——"

The dark head buried itself again in the patched silk cushion, and Jane patted the heaving shoulders, too perplexed to offer advice, and too confused to know how to cope with the new Gloria, so suddenly grown up, prepared to face the brunt of her heroic sacrifice.

A few minutes later the girl raised her head.

"There!" she exclaimed. "I guess the storm

is over. It's been gathering for days and I just had to—turn it loose. Now, Janie dear, I'll be good!" An emphatic little hug gave the anxious Jane further assurance, and when her strong arms, that had so often kept danger from the girl, now wound around the loved form with renewed promise, loyally and affectionately, Jane asked:

"Glory dear, can't you tell Nanty? What—is wrong?"

Instantly Gloria was on the defensive. She affected to laugh but the sound was false and only made matters worse.

"Why, Nanty Morgan! Are you getting—morbid?" choked Gloria. "Now daddy's gone! He'll be out on the big ocean soon and he has wanted that glorious sail so long!" She paused and glared at the picture that stood in its little gold frame on the round table in the bay window. "And when he has made his dream come true, what—could be wrong, Nanty?"

"I know you love your daddy with a double love, Glory darling, but somehow I know you too," said Jane wisely, "and it seems to me——" She stopped and straightened the cushion so

lately dampened with Gloria's tears and crushed with her first real heartbreak—"Well, Glory darling, Jane will be watching, even from a distance, and if you don't get fair play——"

The tone of voice was full of challenge. Instantly Gloria looked alarmed.

"Now, Nanty, you surely wouldn't go fussing around Aunt Harriet's," she said. "You know what a nerve-nest her house is."

"Yes, I know. Your father and your aunt's husband were boyhood chums, they married sisters," Jane said reminiscently. "And they've always been great friends since, but your Aunt Harriet is—well, she's different. She seems to live for that haughty daughter of hers."

"Yes, I know," agreed Gloria.

"But your Uncle Charley? He'll be sure to see you have fair play, Glory," continued Jane.

"Yes, I know," said Gloria again, still lost in abstraction.

"And you'll love him too, now that you have to be satisfied with long waits between your own daddy's letters."

"Oh, yes, I do love Uncle Charley. He's a whole lot like dad, only of course, he isn't dad,"

and the picture in its golden frame was pressed fondly against trembling lips.

"Well, anyhow, dad, I've made your dream come true," sighed the girl, already enveloped in the mist-haunting loneliness.

CHAPTER X

MEET BEN HARDY JUNIOR

"Oh, Gloria, I think he's just lovely!" cooed Millie, dimpling.

"Yes? Glad you like him," replied Gloria.

"Don't you?"

"Why should I?"

"Why—why shouldn't you?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Why, Glo! You're being—horrid."

"Really!"

"Is there anything the matter?"

"Say, Millie, if folks don't stop asking me that, I'll—I'll just make something the matter."

Good-natured Millie looked aghast. What could have happened to Gloria, the jubilant?

"Of course, Glo dear, I know it is awful for you," spoke her companion, quickly as she recovered her gasping breath. "Having your dad go and then you going away from all of us."

(There was no mistaking the affection in her soft voice.) "But I was just thinking how lovely it was that such very nice people are going to take your house."

"We wouldn't give it to folks that were not nice," retorted Gloria.

"Oh, you know what I mean," sighed the unfortunate Millie. Try as she might there seemed no way just now of pleasing the taciturn Gloria.

"Of course, I do, Millie. I was only teasing," came now the welcome assurance of restored good nature. But there was no real ring in it and Gloria fussed about, picking things up and dropping them quite as impotently and as nervously as any grown-up, moving for the first time, might have indulged in.

"But the young man, you know, Gloria," braved Millie, "he's a student, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Have you—that is, have you met him?"

"Why, of course!" Scorn immeasurable exploded with the words.

"I mean, oh, I know you have met him, but—have you been talking to him?" Millie managed to ask.

A burst of laughter rang true this time.

"Millie Willy! Tiddle-down-dilly!" chanted Gloria. "I believe you are going to fall in love with Benjamin Hardy, Junior."

"Oh, Gloria Doane!" and the plump pink cheeks flushed deeper. "I was only just saying——"

"Here he comes! Now you say it to him."

"Oh, Gloria, please!" fluttered Millie, looking for a way to escape. "I've got to go."

"You can't, wait until you hear his velvet voice," laughed Gloria mockingly.

"Honestly, Glo, I promised mother I'd go right back. She's doing up crab apple——"

Gloria put a firm hand on the round arm. "You've got to stay," she insisted. "Think I'm going to take care of—of anything like that all alone?"

A moment later "that" was on the porch and both girls waited expectantly. Millie was not alone in her conscious flushing.

He was fine looking, not handsome but scholarly, and he did have a velvet voice.

Without the least hint of embarrassment he advanced to the doorway already blocked by Gloria, while Millie merely peeked over her shoulder.

"I hope I'm not too early," he said simply, "but

mother wanted me to hand you this note—Miss——"

"Gloria," said the girl in the doorway.

"Oh, yes, Gloria," he smiled. "Some time when we are better acquainted I'm going to tell you what a pretty name you've got," he said, after the manner of any young man who sees a good opening for a clever compliment.

Millie pinched her chum's elbow. Also she emitted a little hissing gasp. But Gloria was grown up enough to repress the smile behind her lips.

"Did you—wish an answer?" she faltered in a politely strained voice.

"Oh, no. It's just something about—something." (He was attractive.) "As far as I'm concerned Old Briney is so glorious I don't care about even a roof, but of course, it may come in handy before winter is over," he remarked pleasantly.

"Oh, it will," replied Gloria, letting her polite reserve fly out on the breeze that accidently flew in. "The house does keep well heated," she felt bound to advertise, "but it gets good and cold in Barbend," she added wisely.

He was edging away. "That's a wonderful

rocky hill over there. Not often do we find one like that around the ocean. May I go up and take a look?"

Millie almost pushed Gloria out the door.

"Oh, Mr. Hardy," said the girl at front. "I would like to introduce my friend, Miss Millie Graham."

The meaningless words that followed led up to all three going over to Baldy Rock to inspect the universe from that critical outlook.

Presently as they exchanged the usual opinions on the glory of the ocean, and the gentility of the land that edged it—even Millie forgot to blush and even Gloria forgot to be anxious.

Here was a boy, a rather grown-up boy, who appeared to have the manners of a young man. He naturally put his hand to the arm of either or both girls if they seemed to need the least assistance in climbing the uncertain rocky way that led to the small cliff.

Now, if that had been Tom or any of the other boys, they might have had a hearty laugh should Millie Graham or Gloria Doane "take a header."

Naturally the girls thought of such a possibility,

yet rather daintily did they "pick their steps" under the guidance of the stranger.

Millie was especially susceptible. She "found her tongue" as Jane would have expressed it, and she chattered so incessantly about the wonders of Barbend that Gloria felt already an alien.

"And when you want to, you can go out to the Light House," chirped Millie, as they landed on Baldy Rock.

"That'll be fine," replied the stranger.

"And you'll be sure to be interested in the big lights——"

"Oh, yes. I mean to take that all in."

"And we know the Light House Keeper, Peter Bender, don't we, Glo?"

"Yes," said Glo.

"And we often go out there in the launch."

A flash from Gloria's dark eyes warned Millie. She stopped suddenly, smiled, and dropped down to a spot from which she was in no danger of sliding. Gloria joined her and both laughed slyly while Ben Hardy focussed his marine glasses upon the coveted view.

"Great!" he exclaimed. "This was worth leaving school for."

"Have—you—left?" asked Gloria.

"Well, you see," he replied rather awkwardly, "I'm going in for science and I'm determined to get my field work done while I need it. I could have gone on with the books——"

"How dad would have loved to have met you!" exclaimed Gloria impulsively.

"Indeed! Why?"

"Because, that's just his—hobby also. He wants to see a part of the world. He knows all about this" (with an encompassing wave toward land and over sea), "but he wanted to prove his book work, as he expressed it. That's why he's gone away." She could not keep the droning tone out of her voice. Ben Hardy respected it and only nodded his head.

"But when he comes back," chirped up Millie, "maybe he'll bring an Indian Prince—to Gloria."

"A Prince! I thought you might have said a little slave, one of those water pitcher kind," laughed Ben.

"Oh, yes, with the earrings——" added Millie.

"And the masquerade costumes," ventured Gloria.

"Well, I'll say he ought to bring something pretty nice to make up for taking you away from

all this," conceded Ben. "Don't you hate tc leave it?"

"Oh, you mustn't," warned Millie, jumping up quickly. "We are all pledged to keep Gloria—to —to——"

"Oh, I see. A thousand pardons!" begged the young man. "And maybe I'm keeping you from something more important, although it couldn't be more enjoyable than this," he declared.

Millie laughed outright.

"Now see here, Miss Millie Graham," he objected, "I didn't say *this,"* touching his coat with his field glasses, "I said that!" waving them at the scenery.

They all laughed. Somehow it seemed easier to laugh than to reply, and Millie just loved a good giggle.

A shout in a well-known voice attracted their attention.

"Oh, here comes Tom!" exclaimed Gloria. "I wonder if——"

"No, nothing is the matter," quickly interrupted Millie. "Don't be so jumpy, Glo. You are really getting fidgety."

Along the rocky footpath Tom was scrambling up to their retreat.

"He's got a letter," faltered Gloria.

"Hope it's good news," ventured Ben.

"Hey, Glo!" sang out Tom. "Here's a special!"

Gloria *was* jumpy. Her heart pounded just now.

"I wonder——" she began.

"It is from New York," volunteered Tom. Then he saw the young man who had been just a little lower down on the other side of the big rock. Tom's blue eyes swept critically over the stranger before he turned to leave.

"Wait a minute, Tom," said Millie. "You want to meet our new neighbor. This is Ben Hardy who is going to live in Gloria's place."

"Oh," said Tom, not over friendly. Then "Hello," he added with a measured smile. "I guess your mail is coming on ahead. I saw some for Mr. Hardy this morning," he said simply.

"You help the postmaster out, I see," replied Ben without any effort to impose upon the boy standing bareheaded in the sun. "Yes, I suppose the mail will find us even out here," he added. "Going back to town? So am I. We can toddle together," suggested Ben good naturedly.

"I'd like to only I'm on my wheel," replied

Tom, losing sight of his resentment in the young man's affability. Tom did resent any young fellow's coming in on his friendship with Millie and Gloria. That may have been how he felt, but possibly he would not have put it just that way.

Nevertheless both boys tramped off, leaving Gloria gasping with her "special" in hand unopened, and Millie gazing at her anxiously.

"What is it, Glo?" she asked.

"I don't know," replied the other, "but it's from dad. Oh, Millie! Suppose he didn't go!"

Millie took hold of Gloria's hand. "Shall I open it for you?" she offered.

"Oh, no, I'm not so silly," faltered Gloria with a quick smile. "But you see, Millie, he's only three days away, and after all—this——"

"Yes, I know, Glo," soothed the other. "But I'm sure he's gone. He wanted to go, he told dad so, only, of course," she hesitated, "of course, he did hate to leave you."

The letter was now torn open and the sheet inside was unfolded in the uncertain hands of Gloria.

"Oh!" she breathed, a smile and a sigh of relief filling out the simple word. "It's all right, Millie. This is only a steamer letter. Sit down and let's read it," and the two chums proceeded to

"devour" the contents of the first welcome letter from the voyager. As they read it they discovered that all was well, and the missive fairly teemed with thrilling details of introduction to the great adventure.

CHAPTER XI

PART PAYMENT

How very different it all was!

And how hard, how very hard it was going to be for Gloria!

The painful separation was over. She had torn herself literally from the arms of faithful Jane, she had waved a goodbye to her dear friends in Barbend, she had promised so many that she would write to them, and now she was beginning the new life at Aunt Harriet's.

"I'm so glad Hazel's gone," said the delicate looking woman with the wispy gray hair.

"Why?" asked Gloria, colorlessly.

"Oh, she's so fussy. And besides I think you and I shall get along better alone."

"Alone?"

"Why, yes, Hazel won't be back for months, I expect. You can't imagine how much trouble we had getting all her things ready." A deep sigh vouched for this.

"But doesn't—isn't—Uncle Charley home?"

"Oh, no." The thin face twitched. "He doesn't come home often."

Gloria's heart sank, that is it felt still heavier, but to the girl seated in the linen covered chair in the semi-darkened room, it did not seem possible that her heart had any more depth to sink to.

"I didn't know Uncle Charley was away," she faltered.

"No, Gloria, I just couldn't tell you," murmured her aunt. "You see——" she hesitated, glanced up quickly, then bit an oppressed lip. "Your uncle is rather—high-minded, you know."

"High-minded?" repeated Gloria. "Why shouldn't he be?"

"Well, what I mean is, he and I can't agree on —well, on everything."

"Do you mean you have quarrelled?"

Again that painful shifting of expression. "Well, when a thing's done and can't be undone I don't see the sense of making a fuss about it," said the aunt, evasively.

The new disappointment was too much for Gloria. She had no wish to press for its details. The one solace in her misery had promised to be the companionship of her "high-minded Uncle

Charley," her father's boyhood friend. And now that was to be denied her.

This new house with all its ornate furnishings—evidently the result of Hazel's extravagant taste—made Gloria feel just as she had felt the day she saw Mrs. Gordon's green plush parlor suit, bought ten days after Jim Gordon's funeral with his insurance money.

That was it. This all represented her dear Aunt Lottie's money. And she, Gloria, was being deprived of her share. It was too difficult to understand. She could not resist the effort to fathom the mystery, neither could she approach it without a chilling shudder.

"But dad is gone!" she kept reminding herself. "That's the one thing that counts, and he doesn't know."

"Did you—how did you manage about your mail?" her aunt asked nervously.

"It will come here," replied Gloria.

"Oh." Then a long pause. It was not easy for Mrs. Towers to adjust this high-strung girl to the unpleasant situation.

"I hope—you'll like it here, Gloria," she felt obliged to remark, rather awkwardly.

Gloria's lip curled. "You needn't worry about

me, Aunt Hattie," she said crisply, "I can stand what I undertake. If I don't like it here I'll go to Jane."

"Oh, goodness' sake, Gloria!" exclaimed the nervous woman. "You wouldn't do that!"

"Why not? Haven't I agreed to keep your secret? You needn't worry that I'll break my word," she retorted, not in the most polite tone of voice either.

"Oh, I know you wouldn't do that," her aunt returned quickly. "I know, Gloria, you do consider a word of honor—sacred." The thin lips completely disappeared behind the woman's strained expression.

"Yes, I guess I know what that means if I have been raised without a mother," said Gloria. She could not repress her chafing sarcasm.

"But such a father as you have! Why, I can't imagine Ed Doane—well, acting as Charley Towers is acting now," said the aunt, holding on to the chair arms as if for moral support.

"Oh, I can," exclaimed Gloria. "If it's anything about—high mindedness, there isn't any one on earth higher than dad."

Mrs. Towers sat back in her chair and breathed in little snatchy gulps. She was evidently sur-

prised at Gloria's show of spirit. Once or twice she seemed about to speak and then turned her head away with a sharp twist.

This was the second day after Gloria's arrival. The first had been too bitter to remember, yet the girl, away from home and loved ones, could not forget it. How hard it had been to satisfy Jane's questions? Her suspicion that things were not to be entirely happy for her young charge kept her until the very last train out to her sister's at Logan Center.

And Gloria had been so eager to get her away! Mrs. Towers could hardly speak civilly, her alarm was so great that Jane would discover the true state of affairs. But Gloria was wise enough to talk of her home and her absent father, thus seemingly, finally, to allay Jane's suspicion, and to account for her own state of depression.

Good old, loyal Jane! Gloria would go to her —she felt determined of that just now—she would go out to the sister Mary's house where all the interesting children were cuddled, if things became unbearable at her Aunt Harriet's.

For Gloria was not to go to boarding school!

This great disappointment was first made known to her on that rainy afternoon, when she

came out to Sandford in response to her aunt's request.

And that was why the world seemed to "go black" all around her, that was why the picnic with all its merriment failed to arouse in her a responsive echo of joy, and that was why her father had read in her face an expression of relief when he was ordered to report earlier—she was glad he would go before her own strength to guard her secret might weaken, anxious that he should go before his own love would sound the depths of her resolve: that his great expedition should not be put off because her own plans for the year at boarding school had been frustrated.

Yes, frustrated! That was the hateful word. But what did it mean? How had it happened? Had not the loving Aunt Lottie been true to her promise to provide for Gloria's education?

Then why? What? How had the disappointment come about?

Question after question rose bitterly to her lips as she faced her aunt, Hazel's mother, and as she realized that Hazel was gone on to the coveted boarding school.

But surely her own Aunt Harriet would not deliberately wrong her! She had given some ex-

planation, of course, but why had she not explained clearly?

There had never been the slightest danger of Gloria telling her father of this change, for that would have caused him to give up instantly every thought of the foreign trip. It had only been the boarding school opportunity for his daughter that had finally influenced him to leave her. But the lure of a whole winter, and even early summer at a most carefully managed seminary, the very one her own dear mother had expressed a feeble wish for, as a place to educate the baby when she should have grown to girlhood, this was that great opportunity for Gloria that had induced Edward Doane to consider his own chance on the foreign business trip.

And she had managed to get him away without discovering the truth!

Even Tom and Millie had been suspicious, but, of course, there was by no means so great and so brave a reason for her secrecy, so far as companions were concerned.

Well, she had managed it all this far, Jane was gone, and now she faced the first result of her heroic sacrifice.

"Part payment," she reflected.

Could she go through with it?

And why was her aunt so secretive?

Why did her Uncle Charley not come home from his business out in Layton?

After the shock she had experienced on the day of her arrival, when the full weight of her loneliness descended upon her, Gloria now picked up the stray ends of all these questions and turned them over in her mind. But looking at the gray haired woman in the chair before her, she who was too gray for her years and too nervous for any reasonable discussion, Gloria could not find the courage to ask again why all this must be so.

They had been sitting there in a strained silence. Her aunt jumped up suddenly with a show of impatience and crossing the room to where the cat had attempted to settle down in a comfortable cushion, shoved the surprised little animal away, roughly.

"No place but a good chair will suit that cat," the woman complained. "Go 'long and snuggle in your own carpet."

The "carpet" was out in the kitchen in a corner, Gloria remembered, and compared with the chair chosen, was indeed hard and uninviting. But she did not protest. Even a helpless cat was not to

be considered in her present upset state of mind.

Her aunt came back from shaking the cushion and chasing the cat, and looked at her sharply.

"I suppose you had better register if you intend going to school," she said indifferently.

"Intend going to school?" repeated Gloria. "Why, Aunt Harriet! You didn't imagine I intended to stay from school, did you?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought maybe you wouldn't care so much about school in Sandford——"

"I don't. I just hate to think of it," retorted Gloria, "but I've got to go. Do you suppose dad would allow me to remain away?" She almost choked on the words.

"Your dad's a good many miles away now and he left you in my charge, didn't he?"

Indignation stung Gloria's cheeks.

"I am sure, Aunt Harriet," she said icily, "that I misunderstand you."

"Now, Gloria, don't go getting bitter," said the other. "I certainly do not mean to propose anything that your father would not like. I was just only thinking, if you really couldn't bear to go——"

"I can't, but I'm going," flung back Gloria.

"And I suppose I had better register to-day."

"While you're out you may as well get some things from the store," said her aunt, ignoring her indignation. "We won't want much but we've got to eat, I suppose," she conceded.

For a moment Gloria held her breath, then she exclaimed impulsively:

"Oh, Aunt Harriet, why do I have to do all this!" Tears welled into her dark, earnest eyes.

"Now, there, Glory," soothed the woman. "It'll be all right. You won't notice the time——"

"Won't notice it——!"

"I mean, a winter isn't long and perhaps even by next term——" she stopped and gave her head a pathetic toss. "You see, Glory, with Hazel's voice and her—her ways, she just couldn't be—put off."

"Oh, her voice," cried Gloria, "what difference can her voice make to me?"

"But she's your own cousin. You ought to be proud of her. Her teachers say she has the finest soprano——"

"What do you want from the store?" Gloria interrupted helplessly. But when she had made out the skimpy list, she could not forget the joy it

had always been to go up to Tom's store at home, and shop for the things Jane was wont to order to please Gloria, or to surprise her father.

This was indeed part payment for her unfair exchange.

CHAPTER XII

UNCLE CHARLEY

EACH day seemed to bring new troubles.

"I just wonder," Gloria asked herself, "if I really did right after all. This is a lot—worse—than I ever expected."

She looked about her at the plainly furnished room. Then in her mind's eye she saw through the wall into the room furnished for her cousin Hazel. The girl with the wonderful voice, the girl with the high-spirited ways, the girls so many at school talked about but so few said anything tangible concerning.

It was always, "Your cousin has wonderful hair," or "Your cousin is going to be a singer," or even, "I suppose you came up to be company for your aunt while your cousin is away at boarding school."

Gloria had simply said "yes" or "no," not deigning to add a remark that might have pleased the curious or critical. But when Natalie Warren

said something about the Towers being "pretty well off," and with the comment bestowing a compassionate glance at the silent Gloria, there had almost been an outbreak of the temperamental flash that always seemed held in restraint just back of those glittering eyes.

"I suppose they consider me the poor relation," she was thinking now, while preparing before the homemade dresser for her day at Sandford Central School.

This thought spoiled the ripple that was trying hard to hold its place in her glossy hair, for a vicious twitch of the comb and a stab with a small side comb made a jagged part at the wrong place, and dragged the pretty wave down disconsolately too far over the sides of her head.

She aired her bed, opened her window and slammed the closet door. This last shook the bottle on her bureau, and if it hadn't been Mildred's parting gift, her "toilet water for boarding school use," Gloria felt she would love to have seen it smash.

She just wanted to smash something. That house was so quiet and so overly well cared for. Even Tobias, the cat, couldn't seem to have any fun in it.

"But it can't last forever," Gloria tried to assure herself, "and I ought soon to be getting mail from dad."

One Saturday evening some weeks later, Gloria's Uncle Charley came home. The sight of him filled her with sudden joy—he was just a little like her dad, and he was the good-natured, thoughtful uncle, who was ever willing to talk of the things she would care to talk of, and always kind enough to "stir up a jolly atmosphere." It was a relief to see him, and the prospects of having the weight of gloom lifted by his presence, gave Gloria a quick reaction to her old time happy self.

She saw him coming and ran off to meet him. When he kissed her he gave her hand a significant squeeze and bade her a hearty welcome. But when they got back to the porch, where her aunt was waiting, a hint of the strained relations existing between them was too evident to overlook.

Mrs. Towers was eager to be very friendly and rather overdid the attempt. Mr. Towers was quiet, smiled like a stranger, and acted almost like a formal caller.

This astounded Gloria. That her own aunt

and uncle should act like that! After a few minutes of vainly trying to lend warmth to the situation, she was glad to escape with an excuse to do something within the house.

From the dining room she could hear the even drone of their voices. Now and then her aunt's would rise insistently and the escaping words were always in defense.

What could be the trouble? More than ever Gloria felt painfully out of place and longed for the things she had sacrificed.

While she adjusted a curtain at the side window, her uncle's words floated in:

"I asked you not to do it. I told you it could not come out right and I shall never stay in Sandford until the matter is cleared."

Gloria drew back instinctively. What was the disgraceful thing he was fleeing from?

Was that what her aunt had called his "high-mindedness"? Then she heard her aunt insist:

"But Lottie agreed——"

"When you pestered her into it."

Gloria was not listening. The words came to her as if they were meant for her ears. She stole back into the other room and sat there in the early darkness. More miserable than ever, she felt

crushed, stifled, and yet she could not even ask a question.

Is there anything more unhappy than to be in a house where a quarrel is seething in the background?

She was going to cry. It was one of her rare occasions but she could choke it down no longer. Here was Uncle Charley and he had brought with him only more gloom. The big cat brushed up to be noticed and Gloria's hand smoothed the gray fur. A grateful purr made her more lonely. Only a cat to be friends with!

For a long time she crouched there. Tobias was asleep and had ceased to purr. The voices from the porch fell into snatches, then footfalls announced their entrance to the house.

Quickly she turned on the light, it still seemed to her a matter of luxury to merely touch a button to make a light, but this house was equipped with all modern improvements, including electricity.

True, there was the lamp she and her aunt always used, the reading lamp it was called, but now with company, Gloria guessed correctly that the electric light was that which her aunt wished put to use.

"Well, Gloria," said the uncle brightly, "how do you like it out here?"

She searched his face before answering, but it was inscrutable. Then she said, "Well, I'm getting used to it, I guess."

"Of course you miss your dad." He stopped. "That's one big thing in a girl's life, to be real chums with her dad," he added rather solemnly.

"Now, Charley," spoke up the aunt with aspersion. "You needn't go hinting about Hazel."

"I'm not," he retorted. "But I never can overlook the difference—Oh, well," he sighed, "what's the use?"

"I had a letter from dad," exclaimed Gloria, glad to break in on the unpleasant trend.

"So soon? Why, I thought his cruise was going out beyond all the incoming steamers," remarked Mr. Towers.

"He did catch a passing steamer though," said Gloria. "Wait, I'll run up and get the letter."

Presently they were both poring over its contents. When they reached that clause referring to Gloria's new school, and had read the line inquiring with deep solicitude, concerning how she liked it at the seminary, there came an ominous pause.

Mrs. Towers left the room. Gloria tried vainly to divert her uncle's interest, but he was plainly indignant.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that your dad doesn't know you are here?"

"No, Uncle Charley, he doesn't," said Gloria, miserably.

"Why?"

"He—would not have—gone."

"And you wanted him to—go as much as all that?"

"Yes."

"I see." He turned over the letter and looked away from the black eyes pleading with him to understand.

"Yes, Gloria," he said. "I do understand. You are a great little girl!"

"No, not really, uncle. I was just so determined that nothing should interfere this time." She gulped in spite of all her show of courage.

Presently Charley Towers got up and paced the room. He was laboring under stirring emotions, that was plain. Gloria wished she had not produced the letter, but it was so difficult to do or say anything safe under the trying circumstances.

"Please don't mind so much, Uncle Charley,"

she begged when he crossed near her chair. "It will be all right——"

"I have no patience with such extravagance——" he broke in sharply. "I never agreed with your aunt's foolish plan and until the matter is adjusted I shall continue to stay away and work harder by being near the business. At least we can do something to catch up that way."

"Is that why—you don't come home as you used to, three times a week?" gasped Gloria.

"Well, that is one reason," he conceded. "That and the opposition I have to Hazel's monopoly of the home finances. Of course, she's only a girl," he added kindly, "but—well, I can't agree with the big plan, that's all."

"Oh, Uncle Charley, I am sure Aunt Hattie is very lonely——"

"Gloria dear," he interrupted, "I have no quarrel with your aunt—now, but I must do what I can to straighten things out, and I can do that best by sticking very closely to my post."

Her aunt's appearance put an end to the confidences. But Gloria was more mystified than ever. What could he mean by straightening things out?

A suggestion that they all go to the evening's

pictures was finally agreed to by Mrs. Towers, and this was indeed a welcome treat for Gloria. She had missed her companions so much—especially Tom and Millie. Each day she told herself she would write them that she was not at boarding school and thus establish a correspondence long delayed, but somehow, when she undertook to write that letter (and she had done so more than once) she would lay it down in despair. What would her friends think of this mysterious change? She hated the thought of their surprise and the talk it might provoke in Barbend.

The photo-play was a rollicking comedy, and out of sheer explosive emotion Gloria fairly shrieked over it. At home in Barbend they had no "Movie House" and here at Sandford a very fine and pretentious auditorium was filled nightly. This was Gloria's first visit, however, although Trixie Travers had invited her to go to see the great picture shown the week previous. Trixy was a typical high school girl and seemed to be fascinated with Gloria. But tonight the picture play had been delightful. Gloria sighed deeply when "The End" was flashed on. Her trials had given her a deeper appreciation of joy, and this

was a splendid sample of the new emotion. But hats were on and they were now all going home.

When she returned with her aunt and uncle, in some way the uncle discovered that she was not using Hazel's room. This brought about another protest.

"Why is she not in that big room with all its silly trappings?" she heard asked.

"The other room is just as airy——"

"I'd like to see Hazel try it," retorted the uncle. "Now see here, Hattie," he said firmly, "if you don't cut out this nonsense short and give Gloria her dues here at least—I'll just cut short our fashionable daughter's career——"

"Charley——"

"Oh, I know how you feel about it, and I know you mean all right, Hattie, but Hazel must learn something of the things we have to know. It is no kindness to her to raise her in an element above that in which she belongs."

There was no attempt to keep the tone of this conversation down, and as the new point of controversy was raised Gloria felt miserable indeed. After all, Uncle Charley's visit had not exactly brought them good cheer.

The next day she was moved into Hazel's room.

There was no need to tell her why—her uncle had been very positive in expressing his wish on that point, so Sunday though it was, directly after church she moved her belongings into the wonderfully decorated and daintily furnished Morningside room. Like a glorious sunset this reacted upon the girl away from home. It was simply inspiring. The paint was a soft ivory, the furniture was of soft "bird's-eye" with every little "eye" in the satiny wood almost blinking its outlines through the ivory tones. Then the cretonnes!

"Imagine mine!" Gloria chuckled, recalling Jane's effort with scrim and a pretty figured flowered lawn. The lawn would always fade and have to come down before winter was half over, and the scrim did get so straggly. But when it was fresh in early fall, and when Millie came in to help drape—Millie was much more domestic than Gloria—during that period of enthusiasm the blue room in the cottage at Barbend was indeed all that any girl might wish to be the possessor of.

She placed her "tools," as Trixy called brush, comb and complexion implements, out on Hazel's dresser in that sort of fashion she had noticed on the afternoon she went with Trixy Travers while

she dressed for tennis. She hung up her dresses upon the satin covered hangers just slightly perfumed, and she put her sweaters in the window-seat box, so that they would not stretch—although she didn't care a pin about such trifles, she felt obliged to respect the conveniences of Hazel's room.

Her aunt was in and out so often that nothing but the fact of her positive need in the kitchen or the consequences of a spoiled dinner, saved Gloria from such supervision as she would have resented.

"Now, do be careful, Gloria," the aunt would caution. "You have no idea how fussy Hazel is, and this room cost—well, it cost——" A wave of the shiny hands and a catch of the snatchy breath finished what words failed to express.

"Yes, it must have cost an awful lot," agreed Gloria. "I wonder Hazel wouldn't have rather bought a launch."

"A launch! Hazel!"

"Why, yes. Doesn't she like to run a launch? I just live for the day when I shall be a captain of my own," said Gloria, jabbing her best silk scarf on a hook and making a hole in the Roman stripe.

"Dear me! I smell the beans," exclaimed the nervous aunt. "But please, Glory, don't upset

anything. You have no idea—Land sakes! My beans are done for!"

Gloria stood before the mirror and gazed into her own eyes. There was a sparkle of fun lurking in their depths, and the girl, so lately stifled in her spontaneous merriment was silently agreeing with the reflected temptation to have "some fun." Why not? What girl could live and be a girl and just mope?

"After dinner," she promised, "we'll see what sort of fun we can dig up out here. I shall die if I don't have a good laugh soon."

CHAPTER XIII

THE QUEST OF A TWEED COAT

With aunt and uncle safely ensconced on the side porch, between books and papers enough to hold their attention for a considerable time, Glory proceeded to "dig up the fun."

"I'll play I'm Hazel," she decided, "although I hope no one asks me to supply the wonderful voice." An original trill demonstrated why.

The blinds were closely drawn, and the Morningside room seemed a safe enough place for her exploit.

"Here, Tobias," she ordered, "you can't stay. You might scratch something or upset a cushion. Skiddoo!"

Reluctantly the big cat went out and again the door was silently closed.

"Every sort of make-up," ruminated the girl. "I may as well be very pretty while I'm about it."

What Trixy called the "tools" were found in a corner of the small side drawer of the dressing

table, and along with them was a collection of various shades of powders, tints and even paste, the like of which Gloria had never before encountered.

They were fascinating. She daubed on white —all around her ears and over her nose, then she perfectly white-washed her nose, although she laughed so heartily, (if she did have to take it out in chuckles,) that a shower of the powder came down almost into her mouth.

Putting on the lip stuff was more serious. It took both courage and invention to find out how to do that, and the girl with the inhuman pallor was not sure at all that she was coming anywhere near the mark.

"I know how to do the cheeks," she decided, "for we had lots of paint on at the last school play." With that assurance she described a red circle, then a full moon on each cheek, ending with a dab on her chin. She had seen someone do that.

"Of course Hazel only does this when she sings, I suppose," Gloria was charitable enough to guess. "But I should think she would have to take lessons to learn how to apply all that stuff; like a landscape."

The tiny brushes for the eyebrows she put aside without attempting to apply them to her naturally long, curly lashes, and when she finally had her hair puffed out at the ears, and turned up at the back and finished the coiffeur with a great belt pin, she gazed at the girl in the mirror with wonder and fascination.

"I don't blame them," she was thinking. "It's wonderful to look like somebody else."

From its own particular hook she slipped the most gorgeous coral velveteen robe, evidently Hazel was not allowed to take such finery to boarding school, for this was too pretty to relinquish, otherwise. The dark flash in Gloria's eyes responded beautifully to the glow of the coral, and with her own slippers—the red felts Jane had given her, she capered around, swishing her long sash and doing a dance not yet done publicly. It was original, and decidedly novel, to say the least. She was having a wonderful time, forgot all her loneliness and almost forgot it was Sunday. After all, it is the best gift of Heaven to be a girl, to be able to forget trouble, and to have hope so imbedded in one's nature that nothing short of Heaven's own weapons can crush it.

"If only Millie could see me," mused Gloria.

Then she thought of Tommy, not that she ever forgot any of her friends for long, but with the new school and its consequent companions, those out on Barbend seem quite a distant away from her.

Very carefully she switched on the light. Everything looked better in the electric glow, and now she tried several new poses. She liked the coral velveteen, she liked her hair high, and she liked the "canned complexion." Twisting her face until her dimples cracked under the enamel, she even talked to herself in the most elegant and theatrical manner.

Suddenly she heard a commotion down stairs. Her plight dawned upon her with something of a shock.

Suppose they should call her! She would not answer, she could not answer until she had—— How could she get all that stuff off!

Voices! Coming up!

"Why, Hazel! This is a surprise!"

"Hazel!" gasped the frightened girl. "What ever shall I do!" She was trying to get out of the robe, she had switched off the lights, and the voices were now at the very door!

"I just had a chance to ride out" (this was

Hazel's voice) "and so I grabbed it. You have no idea how strict they are. One would think we were in a convent." Deprecation akin to scorn.

"Gloria is here," said Mrs. Towers, in a resigned voice.

"Oh—yes." This short sentence was not uttered with any gasp of delight, but Hazel drawled it out meaningly. The "yes" was raised significantly.

"Yes," repeated the mother. "I wonder——" She evidently did not want to admit that the cousin was usurping her daughter's room.

"I've got to rush, Momsey," exclaimed Hazel, entering the door just as Gloria sprang into the closet.

"Mother!" cried Hazel. "Is Gloria using—my—room?"

"Shs-s-hh!"

"Is she?"

"Your father——"

"I don't care anything about father. Tell me, is she?"

"Hazel, please keep your voice down," begged the distracted mother. "You don't know what I've been through——"

"I do, or I can imagine, for I know Gloria. I suppose she was furious——"

"No, she has been actually very sensible——"

"Then look out. She has a motive if she is sensible. But, mother, I have got to run along, or we will be put on probation if we over stay, and there is no telling what may delay us. We had to stop to get air in the car coming out." Gloria was now so far back in the closet that she could hardly breathe, but the door had sprung open a crack so she heard distinctly what the mother and daughter were saying.

"Where's my tweed coat? I've got to take that. It's quite cold evenings——"

She was coming to the closet! Gloria dared not stir! What if she should ever discover her with all that make-up on her face and hiding in the clothes press!

"Where is my tweed coat?" again demanded the flurried Hazel.

"I'll look," volunteered the equally flurried mother, and she came to the closet—pushed the things back—there were only a few hooks between Gloria and discovery. Then some of the things fell down.

"Oh!" shrieked Hazel. "I thought I heard a mouse or something!"

"Maybe Tobias——"

"Turn on the light, mother. I will surely never get out again this week if I am late getting back. You see Jen had her car come down, her father's driving or we couldn't have come. Where on earth is that coat?"

Right in Gloria's eye a heavy fold of cloth indicated a tweed coat. She crouched down still further. The closet was very long, running between two rooms, and at its end was a box covering a heating pipe. The furnace had not been lighted for the season, but Gloria welcomed the pipe-box as something to crouch down upon. It was better than the floor.

If only they would find the coat! Or if they would only give up looking for it! Every second seemed an hour to the girl afraid to breathe lest she be discovered.

"Queer," said Hazel's mother, replacing some of the fallen garments.

"Now, mother," said Hazel, leaving the closet and going out into the room to better emphasize her argument, "you know I don't mind

Gloria being here, but she positively must not use my room. I have spent too much time——"

"Do please be quiet, Hazel. Gloria won't want to use it. She is perfectly satisfied with the other. But we just had to pacify your father." There was a tone of helplessness in Mrs. Towers' voice. Her daughter sighed. They were evidently both much confused.

"But this closet is all on end——"

A gasped "Oh" almost escaped Gloria. She clapped her hand over her mouth to stifle it.

"There's the horn," exclaimed Hazel. "Mother, I've got to go. But mail me that coat and a couple of extra white waists——"

"Hazel, your father insists I shall tell Gloria——" interrupted the mother.

"Now, mother!" this was in complete deprecation. "Do whatever you think best, but don't worry me to death——"

"But I have to be worried to death——"

"But, mother, it may seem mean of me to say it, but didn't you make the big mistake?"

"For you, Hazel."

"Now, Momsey," a resounding kiss, "just you wait until I am a great singer, then you won't regret a single sacrifice. See if I don't make it all

up to you. We understand each other, don't we, Momsey, if dad is difficult?"

The mother's sigh was tempered with more embracing, then the tooting of the motor horn by Hazel's impatient friends outside, made it so imperative that she hurry, there was no further possibility of prolonging the search for the tweed coat.

For some moments after the door was closed Gloria remained in the closet. Then she realized her uncle would soon be searching for her, and she also remembered how difficult it was apt to be to remove make-up.

She pushed the clothes aside and stole out quietly. Once more before the mirror she surveyed her face curiously.

"That was a risky laugh," she told her reflection, "but it was worth the price. Only, I didn't see Hazel, and I am sure she looked stunning. Her voice sounded that way."

Quickly she slipped out of the robe—got the pins and buckles out of her hair, went to the alcove and dipped into the cold cream jar; then she breathed easier.

"If some one calls me now I can appear to have been taking a treatment. Any girl may

daub on cold cream," she decided calmly. In five minutes more she was almost herself again, although the tint of her cheeks was a trifle high, and the lines under her eyes a little crooked. Also she looked a lot prettier than usual.

"I just wonder what it is uncle wants aunt to tell me," she ruminated, feeling livelier and more like herself than she had since coming out to Sandford. "Well, I'd like to know what happened to Aunt Lottie's money, of course, but since I've stood it this long I guess I can hold out a while longer. And even Hazel is quite human. She kissed Aunt Hattie four times."

Her uncle's voice at the foot of the stairs confirmed her guess that he would presently be searchfor her.

"Coming!" she called back, fastening the last snapper of her Jersey waist as she went.

And on her way down she composed an excuse for her aunt's certain questions as to where she had been while Hazel was in the room.

"Poor little Aunt Hattie!" she was thinking, "I wonder was my own mother like her?"

CHAPTER XIV

AT CRYSTAL SPRINGS

GLORIA was much impressed with the scene she sensed, rather than viewed from her seclusion in the closet.

"I wonder if my mother would have been like that—to me?" she asked herself again next morning.

Strange what channels of inspiration affection can open up. Gloria was now resolved to agree with her aunt, and not to obstruct any further her peculiarities in humoring Hazel.

"She's all she's got and dad would do as much for me, just as I would do as much for dad." This was not exactly a choice way of expressing her sentiments, but no critic could object to the sentiments thus expressed.

In the cozy way a girl has of chumming with her own confidence, Gloria went on musing. She was moving her things back to the guest room. As she had been the first guest entertained in it she

felt a sort of natural proprietorship over the rather small room, furnished with odds and ends left from other quarters, and therefore presenting the nondescript effect of a household orphan.

But Gloria felt at home within its confines. There was there no sense of intrusion, and the old red and white quilt was much more sociable with its diamonds, squares and other unique characters, than had been Hazel's yellow and white comfortable, with its edge covered in forbidding white cheese cloth.

"Gloria!" called her aunt from the hall. "You will be late for school. What ever are you doing?"

"Just moving back, auntie," replied Gloria. "You don't mind, do you? I got sort of attached to the other room," she added.

She fancied she could see the look of relief with which her aunt replied: "Just as you like, Glory dear, but don't be late for school."

It was exciting to hear her name called out as "Glory dear." No doubt the aunt had also liked to be called aunty. The magic of accord was started. Both talked merrily and almost excitedly as Gloria ate a better breakfast than she had been accustomed to in her exile.

"Have a little jelly on your bread, Glory," urged her aunt. "You are none too plump, and jelly is fattening."

"Thanks, aunty, but don't tempt me to grow out of my clothes," replied Gloria happily, smoothing her blouse affectionately.

"I was so sorry you did not see Hazel. But she was in a dreadful hurry," continued the aunt. "I guess boarding schools have their drawbacks as well as other schools. She couldn't wait for tea—would have been put on probation if she was a half hour late," declared Mrs. Towers, in a perfect race of words. She was plainly eager to be very kind to Gloria.

"Yes, I was sorry not to have seen her," replied Gloria truthfully. She looked hard at her coffee-cake trying to forget the dark closet corner.

"And, Glory dear, some day soon, very soon, you and I shall have to have a long talk—about Aunt Lottie's affairs. You know you were in such a hurry that afternoon——"

"Yes, the day it rained and I had to get back home," put in Gloria mercifully. She might have said: the day I received the first shock, and ran back home frightened about it.

The clock struck half past eight. "Here's your lunch, I put it up while I was packing your uncle's bag," said Aunt Hattie, although the feat of putting up a lunch and packing a bag at the same time was rather unusual.

"Oh, thank you, aunty," again the endearing term. "I am glad you did, for I want to pick a bunch of dahlias I promised Miss Gray. She has been very kind to me and has helped me a lot with my 'catch up' work already."

With her lunch and the bunch of season's end dahlias, Gloria was soon on her way to school. Her mind was now filled with new fancies. Hazel's flying trip home had been the means of opening Gloria's eyes to the real depths of her aunt's character.

"She would do anything for her," came back the persistent thought, and that was qualified with —"Just as my dad would do it for me."

Where the winding Old Road joined the street that slashed into the village, Gloria met a group of young children, books under their arms and lunches in their hands. They were a rather unkempt little crowd, their clothes all seemed too large, and their faces too small for the rest of them.

"YOU NEEDN'T HELLO US," SAID ONE OF THE LARGER GIRLS.
Page 137
Gloria : A Girl and Her Dad.

"Hello!" Gloria greeted them kindly.

"You needn't hello us," snapped back one of the larger girls unexpectedly. "We don't speak to no robbers."

"Robbers!" exclaimed Gloria, incredulously.

"Yes, robbers. And stealers too," dared the girl. The little group had come to a standstill and were glaring at Gloria in loyal support of their leader.

"I don't know you at all," declared Gloria with a flash of indignation no less sharp than their own.

"Well, we know you all right. You're the girl that lives in the fancy house on Maple Street. Well, that house ain't theirs." There was a menacing threat in this last sentence. It sounded to Gloria as if someone in the background was waiting to wrest the house from her relatives. She knew it was foolish to attempt any understanding with the irate children, so she threw up her dark head and passed on disdainfully.

"Smarty, ain't y'u? Well, you jest wait—wait until my father gets after them stuck-up Towers-ers."

Gloria was no coward but she shut her ear to the tirade. Of all dreadful things she had always

considered disgrace the worst. And this looked like a threat of it. Coupled with what she had overheard of trouble within her aunt's home, there was, to say the least, too much likelihood of truth in some part of the suspicion, for her to disregard it.

"But they would never cheat any one," she meditated. "Of course, folks are apt to get into money troubles, but that wouldn't make them robbers."

The entire morning session was lost to Gloria because of her encounter. Whom would she ask about it? To whom would she go for advice? Trixy had been her friend. She was older, and therefore should be wiser.

Circumstances favored her talk with Trixy. Just as the dismissal gong sounded Trixy called from the corridor. "Take a ride with me, Glo?"

"I have my lunch today—but——"

"Let's eat it out in the woods. I have mine also. Come along. We can get that trolley and be back in plenty of time——" insisted Trixy. Presently the two were pushing their way through the lines and making for the trolley without further explanation.

"It's wonderful out at the Springs, now," said

Trixy as quickly as she could say anything. "I hate the winter to come, but I do love the fall that introduces it."

"I've never been to the Springs," returned Gloria, expectantly.

"That's so. I keep forgetting you are not a native. Well, I'll have to hurry and make up for lost time and get to trotting you around," declared Trixy. "We have some pretty places but not really as rusticly pretty as your wonderful Barbend. How are all the folks out that way?"

"Really, I haven't heard much——"

"Not from your Tommy boy? Why, a little bird told me he was your devoted slave." Trixy could say a thing like that with grace and without the least hint of intrusion.

"Oh, Tommy is a dear," said Gloria, in quite a grown-up voice. "But really, I haven't been writing home——"

"And I've heard about that fine young fellow who has your house, too," declared Trixy, craftily. "You see, I go out to the bay often, and I know a lot of people out there."

At the mention of the "fine young man" Gloria was afraid she might betray herself. She really

had been getting letters from him—purely business letters, of course, but then Trixy might make a joke of that. So she said:

"The Hardys are splendid. Since they have have had our house they have done all the necessary repairing, not letting our agent spend a cent on the place. You see, Mr. Hardy is a big city contractor."

"Yeppy, I know that also," confessed the shameless Trixy. "And his son is a science bug, isn't he? Millie Graham is having a wonderful time showing him all the high bug-spots around Barbend."

"I haven't heard from Millie," admitted Gloria. A sense of impending disaster was almost chilling her. She had been for more than a month without an intimate companion, and she knew now she could go without one no longer. True, Trixy was a "cut-up" and older, but she had shown that initiative and generosity that always begets friendship. She had from the very beginning "taken on" Gloria. And Trixy was one of the popular girls. She had her own car, she had a wonderful home, and only because she was so fond of her father's interests as an important manufacturer did she go to school in Sandford,

rather than to a fashionable boarding school. She wanted to be home with her parents until she would have to go to college.

These particulars were forcing themselves upon Gloria as the trolley was nearing the Big Tree, the stopping point for Crystal Springs, and passengers were gathering up belongings preparing to leave the car.

"What a happy thought to come here," remarked Gloria as they too prepared to alight. "I should have been eating in solitude out in the farthest corner of the grounds if you had not taken pity upon me."

An energetic squeeze upon the arm nearest Trixy made mute reply. It took but a few moments to reach the Springs and here the two girls quickly betook themselves to their lunches.

"It took eight minutes to come out, and allowing that with a margin for the return trip, we may frolic twenty minutes," said the practical Trixy.

"Let's eat quickly then," suggested her companion. "I am dying to run over this lovely little woodland. It looks like the stamping ground of elves and faries."

"Lot's of 'em," declared Trixy, gulping down

more than one bite of sandwich. "Here, try my cake. Our cook, Biffy, is famous for her chocolate."

"Lovely," agreed Gloria. "Here is my cup. Let's try the spring water."

"It will fetch you a fairy prince if you wish with the first drop that touches your lips," assured Trixy. "But don't wish for him to happen along just now. I'd like to make a favorable impression, even if he is your prince, and my hair must be rather skew-gee. I can feel it tickle my very ear drums. But say, Glo, you mustn't use a cup at the Spring. The fairies loathe cups. Just put your pretty red lips——"

Gloria was down over the little boxed-in spring, her face buried in the basin. On the other side of the stone wall that surrounded the bubbling spring were groups of willows that hid the open spaces wending into a pine grove. It was indeed an elfin wood, but as Gloria started to chant something about fairy princes, meanwhile swaying up and down like Egyptians at prayer, something splashed into the tiny pool. She started up and was on her feet instantly.

"A stone!" she exclaimed. "Where can it have come from?"

"Look out!" warned Trixy, just in time, for another stone whizzed through the branches and dropped almost at Gloria's feet.

"Robbers! Thieves! Stealers!" came the shout from somewhere not very far away, and while Gloria recognized the voices of her tormentors of the morning, she felt a sickening sensation, as if she were being persecuted by a secret foe.

"Trixy," she gasped, "let's hurry back to the car. I—can't stand the taunts—of those children."

"After they have answered to me," declared Trixy, hotly. "Then we will go back. But first I am going to shake them into human beings," she cried, already running through the brush in the direction the stones had come from. "They act like savages," she called as she ran. "Hey, there! You young Gormans," she shouted. "I know you. You needn't run! I can catch you!" and as she sped on after the fleeing youngsters, Gloria dropped to a little knoll of grass and sat there disconsolately.

"Thieves and robbers!" she repeated mechanically. "What ever can they mean?"

CHAPTER XV

TOMMY'S TOKEN

BUT even the fleet footed urchins were not swift enough to out-distance the determined Trixy. She raced until she had hold of the uncertain coat tails of young Martin Gorman. Then she got a better hold and proceeded to administer the shake she had promised would make human beings out of them.

"What do you mean? Do you want to kill some one?"

"You lemme me be! I wasn't doin' nawthin' to you," returned the boy, who was cruelly deserted by his companions in crime.

But Trixy gave him a good shake while she had the chance. Gloria was becoming alarmed lest they be late for school, but it seemed that Trixy was only living in the present moment and that meant punishment for the boy who threw stones.

"Why did you do it?" she demanded, looking

at the boy with a glare calculated to inspire terror.

"Well, her old folks is robbers," he insisted doggedly. "My dad says so."

"Who is your dad? What does he know about the Towers?"

"Don't you know?" queried the youngster. "Thought everybody knowed about that."

"About what?"

"Trixy, we have got to get this car," yelled Gloria, who was too far away to hear what Trixy was saying to her victim.

The scuffle ceased. Trixy took her hand from the boy's shoulder and he instantly sprang away like some animal released from a cage. She looked after him for a single moment, then turned back to Gloria.

"If we run we can make it," said Gloria, and run they did, never stopping until they were safely upon the road, with only a few steps between them and the car preparing to move off.

"I gave it to him," panted Trixy. "Those youngsters need corporal punishment personally administered."

"Who are they?" Gloria asked, cautiously.

"Their father is a mason. He did a lot of work around here on speculation, I heard dad

say. I just remembered the name and I know it belongs to those hoodlums," replied Trixy. She was still rather breathless.

The thought that this mason might have done work on the Towers' new home flashed across Gloria's mind, but she did not give utterance to it. Of course, the mechanics might not have been all paid up, but that would surely not have provoked such bitterness.

This was the moment for Gloria to enlist the confidence of her companion. But the cars were so rackety, the people getting on and off so disturbing, and altogether it seemed quite impossible to go into the difficulties under these annoying conditions.

"Trixy," she said rather seriously, "since I have been out here I have felt sort of dazed. You see, I intended to go to boarding school——"

"Oh, yes, I know," interrupted Trixy with the kindliest smile.

Gloria was astounded. She had not supposed any of the girls knew.

"And," she continued, "not going, I hate to—well, I sort of hated to make all the long explanations to my girl friends at home."

"I don't blame you one bit," again assisted

Trixy. "Girls are loves, but the best of us just eat up sensation. Even the girls around here gobble up their share of it," she added mysteriously.

"You mean about me?"

"About any one, you, me, or any one else," replied Trixy. "But I'll tell you, Glo," she continued, "just don't give them any satisfaction. Keep them guessing. That's the way to make them feel your importance."

This was welcome advice to Gloria. She really saw nothing to do but to keep the curious ones "guessing," for, as a matter of fact, she was still guessing herself.

There was little time for further confidence, but the wedge had been driven in and the subject was bound to be renewed at the first opportunity.

Gloria felt more and more keenly now that she would positively have to fight this irritating suspicion.

"Anything but disgrace," she found herself reflecting over and over again. She recalled how she had pitied folks who could not pay their bills, and how she had at one time coaxed Jane to lend the Stanleys ten dollars to satisfy a very urgent claim being pressed by Tommy's store.

She felt like a culprit all the afternoon, and

decided she would in some way have to put a carefully framed question to her Aunt Hattie that very evening.

But Mrs. Towers was in such splendid spirits when Gloria sought her opportunity!

"A letter from your father, Glory," she announced beaming with pleasure. "And the postmark's Honolulu. So he must have landed there."

"Oh, I'm so glad to get a letter," Gloria could not help admitting. "You don't mind, auntie, if I read it all alone first?"

"Certainly not, my dear. It's a lot better that way. You just run up to your room. I've made it up——"

"Oh, thanks. But why did you bother?"

"I was fixing Hazel's things back and it didn't take a minute," declared the aunt, affably.

At the door of her room Gloria exclaimed: "Oh, how lovely!" The cause of her delight was a bouquet of cosmos and she saw a little card stuck where she could not have avoided seeing it.

"Oh," she actually squealed. "From my own home, from Barbend, and from Tommy! Now wasn't that perfectly lovely of him?"

She pressed her face into the bed of blooms and

breathed the air they brought with them. Tommy had not known she was really staying at Sandford unless, indeed, the news had somehow spread.

She kissed a big red cosmos and then turned to her father's letter. It seemed almost too precious to read. She held it close to her heart, breathed deeply, and if one had not known how totally unaffected Gloria Doane actually was, she might have been suspected of acting. After almost reverent deliberation she read the foreign marked missive. The first concern was naturally for herself. How she was enjoying school? She gasped a little and passed that question. Then her dad wanted to know if she was really very well and gaining in weight and not getting any taller?

"Don't you dare grow any bigger," he cautioned. "I can't have my girl growing up to be too big for me to handle."

Instinctively she pressed the page to her lips, "Darling Dad!" she breathed. "I don't care if I was disappointed and if things aren't just——" she paused. The call of those urchins came back like a black shadow. "But don't you dream bad dreams, dad," she meditated. "For your little tom-boy is going to fight the big game right to the end."

The promise of a pretty silk dress from the Philippines, contained in the letter, brought a thrill to Gloria, "for then I can prove to every one just where my dad is travelling," she reflected.

The letter finished for the third time, and read in full to her aunt for the final consideration, Gloria again determined to summon courage and ask about those children.

"Is this house all plaster?" she began, adroitly.

"Oh no. It's concrete," replied the aunt rather proudly.

"Who builds that sort of house, a mason?"

"Yes. We had quite a raft of them——"

"That Gorman out Crystal Spring way is one of the big masons, isn't he? Did he do this work?" Gloria almost choked trying to say all that without showing suspicion.

"Gorman?" repeated her aunt incredulously. "Well, I should think not." (Gloria sighed with relief) "Why do you ask about him?" queried the aunt, sharply.

"Oh, his children go to Sandford School in the lower grade, of course, and I heard some one say the father was a mason. The children look quite forlorn," she ended, as if her interest were purely sympathetic.

"Well, he didn't do any work on this house," said her aunt decisively.

Back in her room a little later she was still uttering sighs of relief.

"Oh, I am so glad," she pondered. "It isn't this house after all. I suppose the children are just of that little rebellious mob who always hate dressed up folks."

But somehow this did not seem a reasonable line of argument. First, they had called after her in the morning, then out at the Spring they had attempted to hit her with stones! Even little rebels would hardly do all that without some real or fancied reasons.

Tommy's flowers were like a lovely party. Every bloom represented the whole life of the fair flower. How it had budded, how the rain had helped it, how the frost had threatened it—Gloria could see every bush of the tall graceful cosmos, as she sat there thinking. She must write to Tommy. And to Millie. It had been cowardly of her not to have done so before.

Then she remembered Trixy's remarks about the young man in her house. What a comfort it had been to have such tenants! Weyland Smith, the real estate agent with whom Gloria's father

had placed his business, had written in glowing terms about those Hardys.

Once started on the letter writing the interest in her task carried her completely away. And she was surprised how simple it was when she actually undertook it. She told Millie she was having a good time at Sandford School and had decided not to go to boarding for another term at least.

"I can get a lot of good training here," she injected, "and when I start at the seminary I won't feel such a greenie."

She told Tom he would be glad to hear she had escaped boarding school "for a time at least," and she was getting along finely in the new work. "It's lots harder than Barbend, Tom," she stated, "but when I have learned what they give in this grade, I will feel I can hold my own among the swells." Her thanks for his flowers were unmistakable in their sincerity.

Now, why had she ever feared to write anything so simple as all that?

It was the milk man who had brought out the bundle of flowers, he who brought the milk from Mrs. Higgins, and now that Gloria recalled it,

she did remember his speaking to her the other day when he came late and she was out early.

"That's how Tom found out," she exclaimed, putting a little snapshot of herself and Trixy in Tom's letter, and another in Millie's. "I might have known he would recognize me."

Then she planned to send something to Tom or his mother.

"I'll ask Aunt Hattie for a few of her potted slips," she decided. "She has such rare plants and I am sure she could spare a few."

So next morning when Jed Stillwell left the milk bottle he took back a basket of plants, all carefully packed so as not to bend or break a single leaf.

Intercourse with Barbend was again "going on."

CHAPTER XVI

A REVELATION

ONCE the letter writing began it fairly showered. Millie was at first distinctly peeved that her best friend should have so long neglected her, and at least three of her letters began with such a charge. Also that Sandford was not "one hundred miles away" was repeated time after time, but in spite of all this, Millie must have forgiven Gloria, for there were many pages filled with affectionate declarations, as well as news. It did seem the name of Ben Hardy or just "Ben" headed quite a few items, and it was easy to guess that Millie still considered him a "wonderful young man and all that." Tom Whitely was so busy that Millie had seen him but seldom, but the direct letters from that faithful friend brought forth the information that he expected to get a place in the new drug store.

Then, one day came a special delivery from Millie. Her folks were going away to the city

for the winter, quite unexpectedly, and she didn't even have time to come out to say goodbye.

"Well," sighed Gloria crushing the little note in her warm hand, "that's another link in our daisy chain, broken."

But she must turn to sterner realities. Her mind seemed to swing in a circle around the suspicions betrayed by the mason's children.

"I guess Jane was right when she used to tell me that joy is a picture framed in shadows," Gloria was deliberating. Not much given to such fancies the fact of her entertaining them betrayed a very serious state of mind.

"I'm glad the hoodlum's father didn't work on this house. I should never feel comfortable here if I found out the charges meant walls unpaid for. Of course, what I feel is mostly pride," she qualified, "but one can't help being—proud."

Her aunt's change of attitude, and with it the life that had suddenly flashed in upon her otherwise gloomy existence, was like a lifted veil. But now there was this sinister threat of those impossible children. What could it mean? Whom could she ask?

With this question uppermost in the mind, Gloria started for school. And just as she had

feared, the shadows that lined the joy pictures stood waiting for her at the Elm Tree turn.

"Those children!"

There they were, four abreast in battle formation, confronting her with some sort of guns ready to fire!

"I'll fool them," decided Gloria. "I'll—go for them—first."

She hurried so they would see she intended to catch up with them.

"Hey, there!" she called out, "Wait a minute."

"Whadda y'u think we're doin'?" came back the retort from the larger boy. A glimmer of admiration shot across Gloria's face. "They're game little things, at any rate," she thought, "if I can only get them to talk reasonably."

The boy stood forth this time and openly charged her.

"Say," he began, "what right has that girl to shake me? That's what I wanna know." He stepped toward Gloria with a threatening gesture.

"Didn't you try to hit me with that stone?" she demanded sharply.

"Suppose I did? Yeah, j'est suppose I did!" He was swaggering in that way affected by boys usually styled "bullies." Their idea is to frighten

the one they consider their enemy, to intimidate them as the boy does his companions when playing Wild Indians.

"Now, see here," said Gloria, in a tone not too friendly, "what have you got against me? That's what *I* want to know."

With a gleam of scorn too deep for utterance the boy cast a look of helplessness at his constituents, evidently his sister, small brother and their girl friend. "Whadda y'u know about that?" he said finally.

"Don't you know I just came to Sandford?" persisted Gloria. She was anxious now to get the matter over with, for at any moment others might happen along. "Why should you—pick on me?" she asked, smiling secretly at the convenient phrase.

"Because you're one of them, ain't chu?"

"Who?"

"Towers."

"I live there. She's my aunt," said Gloria defiantly.

"Then you can't put up no innocent face," spoke up the older girl. "Our mother says you're all alike."

"Sure y'u are," scoffed the boy, who had how-

ever, forgotten all about his fight. He was just digging his heels in the ground as naturally as any other boy might have been doing, and he looked at Gloria less belligerently.

"See here," attempted Gloria again, assuming as nearly as she could the queer tone of voice the youngster employed, "I believe we could be good friends if you would just—let me get on—to all this. Honest, I don't know what it's all about."

Her manner was irresistible. Even the little rebels felt its influence.

"Maybe she don't," said the boy aside. A smaller boy dropped two stones right through what had seemed to be a pocket.

"Well, if you don't know," said the older girl crisply, "you had just better come around to our mother. She'll tell you."

"All right, I will," declared Gloria accepting the challenge.

"You wouldn't dast," said the boy. But he showed a spark of admiration for Gloria's courage. It was betrayed in his questioning tone of voice.

"Oh, wouldn't I!" sang back Gloria. "You don't know me." She it was who boasted now. "I don't like anything better than a good fight—

fair and square and even," she hurried to add. "If we're going to fight, let's fight, but if we're going to play fair, let's play fair." Secretly she was chuckling that her former association with Tommy and his friends had afforded her an education in their peculiar line of arguments.

"That's right," agreed the boy. The little fellow was calling him Marty so Gloria took advantage of the information.

"Now, Marty," she began again, first looking sharply over the road for spectators or eavesdroppers, "if you say so, I'll go up to your house and have a talk with your mother. Honestly, I don't want to be enemies with you. But don't you see, I don't know anything about the fight?"

In that sullen fashion peculiar to children who have a forced maturity, they all turned away toward the road to school. It did not occur to them that an answer was due to Gloria's question. They had a way of shutting their lips tight, just like Jane would have done in trouble, and now they marched off in what might be called "high dudgeon" if they had known what that term meant.

Gloria smiled after them. She had seen other children just like these, and one dominant trait in their character had always impressed her.

They were so loyal!

Also they were brave!

Not being wise enough herself to understand why this was so, she, nevertheless, admired the children for it.

"I believe I could win Marty over," she was thinking as she now hurried along. Her brigands were well on toward the long hill that bent itself up into a great, green hump, with a little smooth landing at the end where Sandford School stood up majestically in all its modern importance.

No nearer to an understanding of their motive in taunting her, Gloria felt more urgent the need of becoming better acquainted with these Gorman children.

"If I just dared go see their mother," she meditated further. "But she might eat me up!"

She had finally decided to search out the home of the children when on her way home from school that afternoon a curious thing occurred. Old Squire Hanaford hailed her, as she was passing his office.

"Isn't your name Doane?" he asked briskly.

"Yes, sir," replied Gloria.

"You're Harriet Towers' niece, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir," again replied Gloria.

"Well, I've been a'waitin' to see you. Suppose you just step in a moment," he suggested.

Up the steps with a one-sided hand rail, Gloria followed the old man. He was twirling his glasses in a professional way, and inside the small door placarded with a country sign, she discovered the clue to his profession. One sign read:

HOMER HANAFORD, JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
ATTORNEY AT LAW

A sudden intake of breath followed her discovery. Why did he want her?

"You know, or maybe you don't know," began the man, swinging back in his chair while Gloria gingerly sat on the edge of hers—"that your Aunt Lottie—she was your Aunt Lottie, Charlotte Macumber, wasn't she?"

"Yes, sir," gasped Gloria.

"Well, as I was saying, maybe you don't know that I am one of the executors of her will."

"I didn't."

"I thought maybe not." He changed the position of his paper weight although there were no papers to be weighted. "Well," he continued, "I am." This was orated rather than said.

Gloria looked out of the window to hide an unbidden smile.

"And since your father is away—that's right, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I feel, I have felt for some time, I ought to ask you—well, to enquire how you are gettin' on over at your Aunt Harriet Towers?"

"Why, very well," faltered Gloria. "Of course, I am getting along splendidly," she managed to amend.

"Then it's all right, I suppose," added the queer little man with the deep set, squinting eyes. His manner was mysterious. He said he *supposed* it was all right, but the words and their tone included an unmistakable doubt.

"Of course, I couldn't go to boarding school," Gloria could not help complaining. "Aunt Hattie seemed to have mixed things up——"

"I should say she did." Again the paper weight was moved, this time to the left. "I suppose you know that house is yours?"

"Mine?"

"It certainly is." The man at the desk was speaking eloquently, but Gloria was dumbfounded. "And if I can do anything to carry out the wishes

of that noble little lady, Lottie Macumber, I'm here to do it."

"You say the house is mine? Why, that was built before Aunt Lottie——"

"Oh, I don't mean the house they are living in. I mean the one that was bought on 'speck,' " Mr. Hanaford hastened to explain.

"But I didn't know there was any other house," gasped the mystified Gloria.

"Well, now! And haven't you heard your own story?"

"No," said Gloria weakly.

"Don't you know why you're not at the fancy school?"

"Aunt Hattie started to tell me," Gloria could not hold back her emotion, "and I was so anxious that nothing would interfere with my father's trip that I simply would not listen. You see, dad had this offer standing for three years. It was the foreign commission for his firm."

"Oh, I see. You were afraid if you heard the whole thing you might not have the courage to come out here," mused the old lawyer. "Well, I must say I admire your pluck. I've heard about it. But it does seem to me that you should stand up for your rights. In fact, under your Aunt

Lottie's orders, I am bound to see that you do."

Just then there flashed before Gloria's agitated mind the memory of this man's name in connection with her Aunt Lottie's only romance. Yes, the name was Homer Hanaford.

"But the house. Which house do you mean?" she asked as soon as she could collect enough reason to do so.

"They call it a fancy name, but that didn't help it any with the Board of Health," replied the man. "You see, it looked all right and when Aunt Hattie went into the thing she asked me about it, as she knew she had to." He shifted in the chair to emphasize this point. "I advised against it, but she won Lottie over. Dear little Lottie! She was so gentle and trusting." He paused and sat very still. Not even the paper weight was pressed into action. Yes, Gloria was reflecting, this must have been Aunt Lottie's knight. He who had sat by her in all her troubles and who wore crepe on his hat at the funeral.

A bond of sympathy was immediately established between the girl at the window and the man at the desk. It was so completely overpowering that Gloria was reluctant to press her questions about the house.

But the lawyer promptly reacted to his duty. "Now, what I want to know, little girl," he said, "is, if you are really contented over there?"

"Why, yes. You see dad thinks I am at boarding school——"

"I knew Ed Doane would never have gone off and left you this way if he knew the truth," said Mr. Hanaford.

"But I'm all right at Aunt Hattie's," declared Gloria, a challenge in her voice. She felt guilty in listening. It was her aunt who should have told her all this.

"Oh, yes. I knew all three sisters. They were all fine girls. I knew your mother too. She was like Lottie, gentle and trusting——" ruminated the romantic squire.

"Do you think—I look like—my mother?" faltered Gloria, glad to change the subject.

"Not much. Just the same curly little mouth, and yes, you have got that famous Macumber dimple right in the middle of your chin."

Gloria blushed at the close-up criticism. She had always wondered if she did look like her mother. Jane said so, but Jane usually agreed on pleasant questions.

"And you didn't know about that fancy house that the Board of Health comdemned?" asked the lawyer.

"Why did they condemn it?" queried Gloria.

"Built on a swamp. Couldn't drain the cellar. You see, a company started a big boom, promised wonders and what-not to investors. Your Aunt Hattie had put too much fixings in the house on Maple Street. I don't know how much she paid for the decoratin' of her daughter's room, but folks around here know. It was talked over pretty generally. So I suppose she hoped to retrench."

This was what those children had meant! It was the house built upon the swamp, of course, decided the startled Gloria.

"And couldn't anything be done with it?" She found herself saying.

"Seems not." Squire Hanaford scratched his head meditatively.

"And they have another house?" Gloria could not quite grasp this startling fact.

"Now, you listen to me, little girl, and make no mistake," said the legal man. "There ain't nothin' wrong about your Aunt Hattie. Folks

blame her a lot, for indulgin' her fastid-i-ous daughter and the like-o-that, but they don't know everything," he insisted. "The fact is, your aunt wanted to turn five hundred dollars into one thousand. The offer was made her an' a lot of others—she ain't to blame alone. Others bit just as hard. Well, here's what happened. This speculator was a young man, a likable chap. He thought he saw a good thing, bought up that strip of land and made a little picture book park out of it. And I'll say this for him, he worked hard himself."

Mr. Hanaford paused for breath. Also for a moment's reflection, and Gloria seized upon the space to insert a question of her own.

"Did they call it Echo Park?" she asked eagerly.

"The very name. Wasn't that fanciful? Just like a magazine picture and the whole thing now is —a swamp."

"I've heard of the place," said Gloria like one dazed. "It is out near where my—my friend, Miss Jane Morgan, is visiting her sister. Wasn't it too bad? And did poor Aunt Hattie lose the money in that venture?"

"That's where it went to," said Homer Hanaford with finality.

Here indeed was a new problem.

What could a girl do to satisfy such a claim as the Gorman children so rudely pressed?

CHAPTER XVII

A SERIOUS PREDICAMENT

AFTER nearly three months of suppressed curiosity, the revelation so calmly made by Squire Hanaford all but stunned Gloria.

"The children were right," she pondered. "Their father's time was put in on the fancy house and he never got paid for it. He expected to have a share in the big speculation."

Somehow the children's attempt at revenge carried a clear claim. They had been wronged. Their mother, Gloria learned, was a delicate woman who expected to have had hospital treatment when the big money would come in. Their father was a plain but indignant man. He made threats against the Towers, and when Charley Towers learned the true state of affairs he promptly undertook to pay back what he could of the debt contracted by his wife. He had been sending money weekly, but it was a small payment for the great loss. This mason was to have

shared in the promised profit on the entire venture, and so had put into it, besides his own and his men's time, quantities of material. Squire Hanaford had explained that Echo Park was the dream of a young man with noble ambitions. The place, like many other beauty spots, had been overlooked until the young discovered it. His name, the squire told Gloria, was Sherwood Graves, and his ambition reached the point of a fine piece of development with one of the model cottages completed. This was bought by Mrs. Harriet Towers, with the money due Gloria in time for her to go to boarding school. But before that time the land became mysteriously flooded, the eager but unscientific Board of Health condemned it, and the young man, cruelly disappointed, lost his health so completely, he was promptly ordered to a foreign clime or threatened with mental and physical fatality.

"What a romantic name, Sherwood Graves?" Gloria repeated, "and how noble for a young man to dream of beautiful parks and model cottages!" she sighed deeply. Why had her money been such an unfortunate agent?

In those first few days after Squire Hanaford's revelations, Gloria had longed so for Jane that

only Trixy's conforting reassurance saved her from leaving Sandford and going out to the faithful friend at Logan Center. Twice Jane had promised to come in to see Gloria, but some sudden illness of one or more of the many children, caused a postponement fortunate for Gloria, as she had not yet told Jane the entire story of her stay in Sandford.

"Visiting with her aunt for a while" was a sufficiently reasonable excuse, and that Aunt Hattie was "so fussy" perhaps influenced Jane in her prolonged separation from Gloria, for Jane was at all times considerate.

Now it was clear to Gloria that Sandford girls had purposely avoided her. Those who sought her companionship were not such as she would have chosen, and only Trixy, the independent, was really her chum.

"And that's why the girls have been avoiding me," she mused bitterly. "The folks around here —are shunned—for being—in debt." All the narrowness of a place like Sandford suddenly confronted her. Trixy, the brave and lovable, had been her friend, while the others turned their heads away scornfully. Suspicion painfully confirmed, brought to the little girl from Barbend a

sense of something very like shame. She who had never known the blight of contempt, now felt the full blast of its venom. And being a girl, like a fragile human flower, the hidden thing was magnified. She suspected all Sandford as her enemy, she brooded over the disgrace until it seemed unbearable. Debt! How she had always pitied those in debt! But to owe a poor workman with a sick wife and a family of small children!

"I must see those children," she determined. "Perhaps I can do something." It was just before Thanksgiving and during a long damp spell of weather that so often proceeds the onset of heavy frost. For two days Gloria watched in vain for the Gorman children, then she learned from the boy in the drug store, that their mother was dangerously ill.

Her first impulse was to ask Trixy to drive her out to this place, wherever it might be, but that was discarded in the face of its consequent revelations. She could not let even Trixy know that money, which should have been hers, had been used with such disastrous consequences. She must find the children alone.

Second River, that section where the Gormans

lived, according to the drug clerk, was too far away to admit of ordinary foot travel. It was well enough for the children who, no doubt, knew many short cuts, but not for Gloria. A bicycle was the most practical means of making the trip, and, fortunately, Mona Sheehan was friendly enough to lend Gloria her wheel for a few hours on this Saturday morning.

Each new development in her tangle added more to the already overwhelming weight of suspicious disgrace. And of all dreadful things possible, that of public censure seemed to the high-strung Gloria the most dreadful.

"If I could ride away from it all—and go to Jane," she sighed as the borrowed wheel rolled over the country road out toward Second River. The roads were heavy with mud, and as Gloria pedaled along, her spirits became imbued with the unhealthy conditions surrounding her.

"I don't blame them one bit," she told herself. "They always have to live in the worst places, these poor hard working folks, and if any one has to wait for their money it's the poorest. Jane always said so."

One more long pull up a hill and a coast down another, then the house with the red barn out

front, described as Gorman's, hove into view. Confronting it Gloria felt a surge of apprehension sweep over her.

Suppose the mother should be very cross and unreasonable? Or worse yet, suppose the father were home and should scold—oh, she never could stand any one scolding, especially a stranger! Even Jane respected Gloria's fear and hatred of a wordy war.

Fiercely she pumped the wheel. She would never stop until she pulled right up to the old gate post, and then she would have to go in, for the cottage looked directly into the road and, no doubt, some of the numerous children would espy her coming.

But just as she guided herself carefully over a rough spot and was taking a necessarily long breath after the exertion, a shout came from somewhere.

She knew the voice. It was Marty's!

"Hey! Wait a minute!" came the appeal. "Stop! I want to ask you——"

So abruptly did Gloria back pedal she almost fell to the ground.

"What is it, Marty?" she asked, noting the

agitation of the child and his tear stained features.

"Oh, come quick! I think she's dyin'!"

Dropping the wheel to the gutter bank, Gloria silently followed the frightened child to the cottage. He kept moaning and murmuring but his words were strangled in fright. "She's dyin'," he repeated.

A chill of terror seized Gloria at the word dying.

"Oh, no," she cried. "She must not die, and leave all you babies——"

The boy darted ahead and Gloria quickly followed. She saw nothing of disorder as she went through the briar path, nor did she notice the other signs of neglect that confronted her as she hurried to get into the dingy old house.

But within! What a sight!

"She's dyin'! She's dyin'!" moaned Ellen, the oldest girl, who, with a tiny baby huddled in her arms, was wailing and swaying up and down against the disordered bed upon which Gloria now saw the afflicted mother.

"Oh!" gasped Gloria. "You poor—poor creature!"

Gasping for breath and uttering choking gasps

the woman lay there, and even in her agony she seemed to be trying to quiet her panic-stricken little ones. Now she fastened her eyes upon the stranger and tossed her head from side to side, struggling to say something, but only biting back the attempt with colorless lips.

"What is it?" demanded Gloria, from Ellen.

"She—she took another—dose!"

"Of what?"

"The—medicine," gasped the frightened girl. "He told her not to take any more, but—she couldn't stand the pain! Oh, don't let her die until father comes!"

"Where is he?"

"Away—workin'. He won't be home till Saturday night!"

As if the hand of death would wait for time, this overwrought girl could think of nothing but the terror of her mother dying with the father not there to know. Her helplessness was pitiful. How they depended upon that father!

"Was the medicine poison?" demanded Gloria watching with terror the twitching of the sick woman's face.

"Two doses was. And the doctor warned her——"

"Never mind that," ordered Gloria, "and stop crying. We must do something. What do you give if she is—weak?"

"Coffee," replied Marty promptly. "It's on the stove."

Following Gloria's lead Ellen got to her feet, lay the baby in its cradle in spite of violent protests, and although the crying still kept up, its intensity was quickly lessened by something stuck in the infant's mouth.

In a few moments Gloria had the coffee hot and was trying to make the woman drink some of it.

"Here, please," she begged, with an arm under the frail shoulders, "drink a few mouthfuls——"

How she held the woman up Gloria did not stop to consider. She simply realized that something must be done promptly, and reasoned that the medicine must have been of a sort to relieve pain, therefore a sedative. For this, Gloria knew, coffee might act as a reacting stimulant.

Quite as if she had performed a miracle, the children gathered around the bed, wide eyed and wondering. Ellen stared so that her eyes fairly bulged out in glaring balls. She had been the most terrified, probably having a keener under-

standing of the fate that hung over them, and perhaps, feeling somewhat responsible for her mother's accident.

"I put it on the chair," she protested, "and ma was asleep. When she woke——" She clenched her hands and still stared at the figure on the bed as if trying to realize that it breathed and was not dead.

"Don't be so excited," cautioned Gloria, although her own heart beat so she could scarcely keep her arm under the shoulders, while the sick woman sipped and gasped. Finally, after taking perhaps two tablespoonsful of the reviving liquid, the heavy burden shifted itself from Gloria's support, back to the pillow with a collapsing sigh.

"Better?" asked Gloria, with a sense of liberation.

"Yes," came the word faintly spoken. Then the fluttering eyes closed and the woman's breathing seemed less gasping.

"Now?" asked Gloria glancing around for the first time at the children who seemed huddled all over the place. "What shall we do?"

"Mrs. Berg ain't home," spoke up Marty, who appeared to have the most sense of any of the

panic stricken brood. He seemed like Tommy in his self reliance.

"She's the woman who comes in," explained Ellen.

"She lives by the canal," added another child, whom Ellen called May.

"I'll jump on my wheel and get a doctor," Gloria volunteered.

"Oh, please don't go away!" begged Ellen, terror again straining her young face.

"But we must get a doctor," insisted Gloria, anxiously.

"I'll go," spoke up Marty. "I can ride your wheel if y'u don' mind."

"Certainly, take it and hurry," begged Gloria. "And, can you telephone, Marty?"

"Sure."

Then she gave him Trixy Travers' number and asked him to summon her friend with her car. The next moment Marty was off.

Gloria was deciding quickly that the sick woman should not die if the doctor would agree to her transference to the Marie Hospital.

"We'll manage to get her there somehow," she was deciding, but no hint of her intention was

given to the hysterical Ellen, or to the other terrified little ones.

While Marty sped off Gloria heated more coffee and again undertook the difficult task of forcing the half conscious woman to drink some of it. But even the seriousness of this did not blot out the memory of her real mission there. Perhaps pride is a tyrant, yet it must be reckoned as inspiring, when the best that is in one responds to its call. Gloria was determined to see about that ill-fated little park with its fairy house, planned by the young man whose dreams failed him.

"Ben Hardy!" thought Gloria suddenly. "He ought to know. He is a student of nature and this seems to be entirely Nature's fault."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE EMERGENCY CASE

WHEN, after what seemed hours of waiting, Marty finally returned without the doctor or the promise of one, the little band fell again to wailing and weeping that their mother would surely die before their father would come home. The sick woman had not revived sufficiently to reassure them, and even Gloria, who insisted that she would be all right as soon as the doctor would arrive, now felt helpless indeed.

"But the girl will come," panted Marty. "I got some one on the phone who said she'd be out right away."

"Wasn't she home?" asked Gloria eagerly.

"Not then, but comin'," insisted the boy hopefully. Again he was so like Tommy.

During all this time Gloria became more and more anxious about her Aunt Hattie. She had not dared ask Marty to phone her, lest his message frighten the nervous woman, but recalling

how ill she had looked that morning she realized that perhaps she had not wanted her to go out, else why had she asked would she be away long? Gloria felt trapped and helpless in the emergency.

"Where's the nearest phone?" she asked, anxiety now getting the better of her.

"There ain't any," declared Ellen.

"There must be one somewhere. Isn't there one in any of the big barns?" persisted Gloria.

"No," scoffed little May, who, it seemed, must have often been called upon to relay messages, tiny tot that she was.

At this point the baby started to scream. It had really been neglected, and Ellen immediately began fixing its complicated food. The mother stirred and finally opened her eyes.

"Sh-s-s-s-h!" whispered Marty. He crept noiselessly over to the bed, put a brown hand on the white brow and looked so lovingly at the stricken woman that Gloria's heart leapt. To have a mother, even a sick mother! What a blessing!

"Better, ma?" asked the boy close to the rumpled pillow.

"Yes—dearie," replied the woman, in tones stronger than might have been expected. "She's an angel." This was meant for Gloria.

"Ye-ah, that's it," agreed Marty eagerly, while the other little ones gathered around beaming and exclaiming. Their mother was awake and she was better! What else was there to ask for? Their spirits rebounded electrically.

"Her nourishment?" pressed Gloria. "This is the time she must have that."

The baby was dropped unceremoniously into May's lap, but having the "bottle" made up for that discomfit. Ellen and Gloria heated the small saucepan of broth (left by Mrs. Berg the day previous) and without delaying longer than the time necessary to put the broth on a saucer and to put the saucer and spoon on a new pie pan, used as a tray, the two emergency nurses timidly began their feeding.

Gloria knew, instinctively, that the woman would now show decided improvement. The sleep and semi-coma from the overdose of her medicine had been spent, and now, perhaps, all would be well, and she, Gloria, might get back to her own urgent affairs.

During the past hour she could not get the white face of her Aunt Hattie out of her mind. It seemed to call her—to plead with her.

"Jumpy, as Millie would say," Gloria tried to

reassure herself. But when a "honk" from outside shrilly announced the arrival of Trixy and her car, a great wave of relief enveloped the good Samaritan.

"I'm so glad!" she sighed.

Every one of the small group of dingy windows was immediately darkened with eager little faces.

"Here she is! Here she is!" cried a chorus.

"And—yep, here's the doctor too!" announced Marty.

"And it's a great big swell car—hers," chirped up May.

"You bet!" confirmed the little fellow called Dick. He was so small and so humble he seldom was called, or did he make his presence felt. Dick was about as big as a watch charm and looked like one from India.

The doctor and Trixy appeared at the door, simultaneously. With that hushed awe significant of his presence, the man with the small black bag went directly to the bed, while Trixy and Gloria clung to each other in the briefest, if warmest, embrace.

In the general room all the children, automatically collected as did all the family cares, but now Gloria, and the ever prompt and responsive

Trixy, quickly gathered the fluttering brood, like so many little chirping chickens, and crowded them into the slant roofed kitchen. Ellen stayed with the doctor. Evidently she was accustomed to that office.

Neither Gloria nor Trixy gasped nor exclaimed. They were too sensible and too serious. That she had come in the big car with her chauffeur was easy to understand, for having received Gloria's urgent message and knowing that she would only be out at Gorman's in a real emergency, Trixy took no chances of being hampered with her own little runabout.

"You have been having a dreadful time, I know," said Trixy. "I was so sorry I happened to be out."

"But you lost precious little time in getting here," said her grateful companion. "Trixy!" there was a gasp with this. "I feel like a human churn. I am scared to death about Aunt Hattie —and my nerves are just churning."

"Oh, she's better. Doctor Daly said so——"

"Better! Was she —sick?"

"Didn't you know? Of course you didn't. They have been looking to the ends of the earth for you," added Trixie. "Why, yes, the doctor

was with her most of the afternoon. She had a sort of hysteria. You know she is subject to such spells. I am sure she will be all right."

"I knew it! I felt it!" sighed Gloria. "Isn't it hard to know where one's duty lies? Here I have been with strangers," she swept her eyes over the forlorn place, "and Aunt Hattie did not know where I was."

"But they needed you most. Your aunt was not buried in a wilderness like this," whispered Trixy.

As if she were a fairy queen, the children gazed spellbound at Trixy's fur coat, her smart feathered turban, and above all they felt her magnetic personality. She was more fortunate than to be just pretty. She was fascinating. The youngsters had by now been accustomed to Gloria, and with their juvenile inconstancy they turned to the worship of the stranger.

"Trixy," again whispered Gloria, "you know I was coming to—try to do something. I had found out about their father's loss——"

"Yes, I know, kiddie," said the taller girl, considerately. "And that was what I suspected. Had I only been in town when they sent the bell ringers out after you I should have guessed here the first shot."

Gloria sighed with relief. Trixy always understood. But the doctor was leaving the bedside. Both girls stirred to meet him.

"Well, young lady," he smiled into Gloria's face, "this is where you have been, is it? I won't make you vain or proud, but I will say it is a lucky thing you found these little ones when you did. Their mother might have slept, or she might have—well, it is a good thing you gave her the coffee, at any rate. She has been so weakened, the extra dose of medicine might have been hard to fight against." He was rubbing his hands as all doctors do, a way that May once said was the scraping off of his sick touch.

"I am sorry I gave folks a scare. I did not intend to disappear," said Gloria finally. "But there was really no time nor any way of getting word back."

Doctor Daly did not raise his head. He was thinking very seriously and seemed greatly perplexed.

Trixy broke the silence. "What now?" she asked critically.

"I don't know. This little woman——"

"Can she be taken to a hospital?" asked Gloria, eagerly.

"She could—but how?"

"Right in my car," responded Trixy, decisively.

"That was why I sent for Trixy," exclaimed Gloria. Then they waited for the opinion of the physician. The children listened from their corners, fearing, they knew not what. Ellen, the manager, poked her head under the doctor's elbow.

"Oh, you can't take her away till father comes," she exclaimed. "He would be wild!"

"Hush," cautioned Gloria. "Ellen, the doctor knows best. You surely want your mother to have help?"

"Oh, yes, but you're here."

"She can't stay here," promptly spoke up Trixy. "I suppose none of you has had anything to eat all day."

"Come outside a moment," suggested Gloria in a subdued voice. "Ellen, you keep the others in here," she then ordered quite authoritatively.

At the door, in the early dusk, the doctor and his two young aids quickly consulted. He showed his own relief when the hospital prospect loomed into a possibility.

"I have been afraid to leave her here," he explained. "But that little witch Ellen——"

"She seemed to think her mother just couldn't die unless her father said so," injected Gloria, whimsically.

"Well, as long as you think it is safe we shall just bundle her in my car——" proposed Trixy.

"But the trouble is——" The doctor paused and turned his head aside thoughtfully.

"What?" asked Gloria.

"I am afraid we can't get her into a ward. I've been trying, but they're packed."

"I have the money to pay for a private room," spoke up Gloria, at the moment bringing from her blouse a very fat bill fold. She opened it and displayed two fifty dollar bills.

"Why, Glory Doane!" exclaimed Trixy. "Been holding up a bank?"

"No, it's every cent mine," replied Gloria rather breathlessly. "It was with the money I came here. We owe it to them——"

"Never was money more in order," exclaimed Dr. Daly, accepting the two yellow bills Gloria offered him.

"But why should I take your money, child?" he presently asked Gloria, as if "the case" had completely obscured his reasoning on that point in the first place.

"Oh, it's all right, in fact it's theirs," faltered Gloria, feeling her face burn and biting her lip to hold it from trembling. "I came out here to bring them this money——"

"I heard Mrs. Gorman say she expected something of the kind," interrupted the physician. "Well, it has come just in time. Even a hospital can do things for money," and as he turned to his task, Dr. Daly proved himself to be the man of power his many admirers claimed him, for in less than half an hour the sick woman was on the back seat of Trixy's big car, with so many robes around her that Trixy kept one hand anxiously near the small white face, lest too much covering should exclude all the air.

Jennings, the chauffeur, had assisted willingly, and with orders from Gloria that she could collect Jane at Logan Center on her way back, Beatrice Travers, the capable daughter of Sandford's most esteemed manufacturer, gave the word for the cortége to proceed.

Dr. Daly rode in his own small car on ahead.

"They're gone!" gasped Ellen, leaning miserably against Gloria.

"Yes," said Gloria, "but my friend will soon be back, and I hope she brings with her some one who

can take care of you. Jane was my own dear old nurse."

Marty stood in the small door like a little corporal. He had a way of appeasing the children, and of doing things capably.

"Glory," he said, raising his brave young eyes to the girl coming back from the gateway, "I'm awful sorry—about the stones. We didn't mean you a-tall. It was them other folks."

"I know," said Gloria, smiling her forgiveness. "But my aunt didn't mean to wrong you. And she's sick—has been sick all day. Oh, Marty, I am so worried I can hardly wait for the car to come back."

"Then—you're goin'?" he asked, wistfully.

"Oh, yes, I must. But don't worry, for you won't be left alone."

A tumult within demanded the attention of both Marty and Gloria.

What could be worse than a family of helpless little ones bereft of their mother through the unknown terror of a hospital?

"If father could only know!" wailed Ellen.

"I'll send him word somehow," promised Gloria.

CHAPTER XIX

THAT CROWDED DAY'S END

TRIXY brought Jane back with her. And she, being Jane, asked no foolish questions. It did, however, take her a few minutes to regain her composure. It was so long since she had seen her darling "Glory." And to find her here, in all this misery, like a ministering angel with her eyes now begging liberation!

Jane clasped and reclasped the slender form. Gloria choked and gurgled back her own tears.

"Jane! Oh, Jane!" she hardly whispered. "I've needed you so!"

"Then why——"

"If you will just give your orders, Miss Glorified, Beautified, Florence Nightingale Doane," interrupted Trixy, "I'll shoo Marty off for the Berg nurse. We really must make rapid strides now if we are too cover the rest of the high spots."

"You're right," said Jane, tilting her chin down on the baby's fist that was so intimately exploring

her neck lines. She had rescued the child as her first maternal act following the reckless joy of reclaiming her own baby, Gloria. "I thought my sister's children were active." she declared, "but these, the poor neglected darlings!"

"Pile them all in the car and shoot them off with Marty," suggested Gloria, using Trixy's apt term. "They will be enthralled with such a ride."

"The very thing," agreed Trixy.

"And perhaps then I can move my feet," hoped the rather confused Jane. She wanted to do so many things to right the upset place, but nothing she could do would have seemed magical enough to achieve that. The disorder was appalling, but not unpardonable.

Jennings again spread the robes to save the handsome car, and when all, even tiny May and shy little Dick, were piled in and started off, with Marty up front and Ellen in the middle of the back seat, Gloria and Trixy indulged in a life saving laugh.

"Thrills!" cried Trixy. "And more thrills! Gloria, I'll never call life in Sandford dull again! You would make an irresistible nurse!"

"And you a captivating ambulance driver!"

"At a foot-ball game!"

"Played in the mud!" they chuckled.

Jane was actually singing to that benighted infant.

"If Mrs. Berg is not at home yet, what ever shall we do?" asked Gloria seriously, when Jane stalled on a high note.

"She will be," said Trixy. "And, Glo, I must 'fess up. I've had a little interest in this case myself. You see, Sherry Graves, who made the unfortunate little park and planned the disastrous model house, was—still is—a friend of mine!"

"Trixy!"

"Yes. And I used to go out there with him—and watch it grow."

"Oh!" The sigh was eloquently affectionate.

"Yes!" Trixy kicked her heels against the old lounge. "And it all seemed so stupid. Father sent for engineers, but they wouldn't do a thing until Spring. Couldn't tell where the water came from and didn't even take a serious interest." She sighed now. The ebullient Trixy was at last revealing herself. "Then Sherry's health failed and he sailed away!"

Gloria's arms were trying to show her sympathy. She was too overcome to speak, but Trixy went on:

"Until you came, Glo, I was just a wreck. Of course we don't call it love, but Sherry is a wonderful boy and certainly talented."

"And people around here are so—so uncharitable!" breathed Gloria. She knew now that every one associated with the Echo Park venture was being made subject to public censure.

"Yes, I know. Sherry isn't here but I can't help hearing their continuous slurs!" Trixy looked mature and very handsome just now, this young girl with the lilt of the lark and the heart of a dove, thought Gloria.

"But we've done something," Gloria said. "This is at least an attempt at reparation. Poor little Aunt Lottie! That her money should have worked such misery!"

The big car swung into the lane again, and the round capable face of Mrs. Berg was unmistakably in the group that peered out as they came.

Just how the final arrangements were made no one could tell, for confusion developed into veritable Bedlam. But the two girls willingly enough found their own places in the car, while Jane delayed to make sure that Marty would go over to Logan Center, first thing next morning. Mrs.

Berg, fortified with a ten dollar bill from Trixy, had agreed to give up her place at cooking for some overburdened farm woman, and stay with the Gorman children until their mother "was cured." She also added that crowning feat of wonder—she would notify the absent Mr. Gorman.

" 'Tain't no bother a'tall," she smiled. "Joe Smith goes into Franklin with his team every mornin'."

Marty clung to the car until Jennings warned him with the hum of the engine. Then he called out to Gloria:

"Don't forget!"

"I won't. First thing?"

"Sure!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" and the little faces faded away in the softening eventide.

Jane was too overcome to speak. But she finally did gasp: "That baby!"

"Mrs. Berg will take good care of it," Gloria assured her, sinking down comfortably against the familiar shoulder.

"But I want to know," spoke up Trixy, "what was the date you made with Marty?"

"Oh," faltered Gloria, betraying real confusion. "He promised to show me around a little."

"Oh yes," retorted Trixy. "Out around Echo Park?"

"Yes," assented Gloria, and then the question was mercifully changed to matters Jane could comprehend.

She was promptly told about Mrs. Towers' sudden illness, but her own knowledge of that woman's nerves offset any show of surprise at this.

"But don't you get excited, Glo," warned Trixy. "You have had enough excitement for one day, I'll testify."

This advice, however, could not possibly forestall Gloria's excitement when she was actually confronted with her Aunt Hattie's condition a short time later.

Jane and Trixy kept in the background, preferring to wait in the living room, while Gloria, in spite of an officious person called Martha Drake, made her way directly to her aunt's room.

"Oh, Gloria," wailed the woman from the pillows. "I'm almost dead! Where have you been?"

She was seriously changed—even with a quick glance Gloria saw this and tried to calm her.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Auntie dear," she murmured, "but I couldn't help it."

"I don't blame you! I knew you'd go. You couldn't stand it here!" gasped the sick woman. "It was all my fault, Glory. But I tried——"

"Please don't talk so, Aunty," begged Gloria, now on her knees beside the bed, "I only went to see a—sick friend, and I couldn't get away!"

"I know. You went on Mona's wheel and you took all your money, and I thought——"

"That I had run away! Oh, Auntie! Of course I didn't. I wasn't unhappy here, and you have been good and kind to me——"

"After cheating you! After sending Hazel in your place! After stealing Lottie's money!"

"Hush, Auntie, don't!" begged Gloria, feeling the hand of Martha Drake urging her to leave the room. "You are only excited and worked up. I know you did nothing wrong, and you must not blame yourself so——"

A grateful look came over the face of Harriet Towers. "You have taught me, you with your quiet, determined spirit. But I've done what I could. Squire Hanaford now has the deed of that—that place, and it's to be made out over in your name."

"In my name? But I don't want it," protested Gloria, going toward the door.

"I couldn't live another day until I did it, and I'm afraid——"

"You did too much in one day. And a lot of it was my fault," murmured Gloria contritely.

"When I found you had taken your money, your fur coat money——"

"I needed it for—the sick friend."

"Was it—was it—for—that poor wretched little woman, Margaret Gorman?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I'm so glad. She has been so sick and she dragged herself here, and I promised——"

"But she'll be all right again soon," broke in Gloria. "We took her—that is we sent her to Marie Hospital this afternoon."

A perfect flood of relief swept over the face of Harriet Towers. Surely the weight of her anxiety had been hard to bear.

"You must come out," insisted the officious Martha. "The doctor ordered quiet and you can't call this——"

"He couldn't have ordered miracles," spoke up the Aunt Hattie, "but they came, just the same. Glory, come over here and kiss me."

Gloria did, fondly and gently.

"Now with a night's sleep I'll be able to go up to Squire Hanaford's and sign that deed. When your Uncle Charley comes tell him I'm just—napping!"

"She needs it," snapped Martha, putting the shade before the light and smoothing the bed clothes.

Gloria crept down stairs. She found Dr. Daly talking to Jane and Trixy.

"She's sleeping!" was Gloria's announcement.

"And that's all she needs," declared the doctor. "This thing has been preying on her mind until she's all but a wreck. Of course, she was always frail, but sick women are like flivvers. They give and take a lot. I need not see her," he protested as Martha attempted to lead him to the sick room. "I was just passing and I wanted to tell you all that I left poor Mrs. Gorman very comfortable indeed."

"And my folks are waiting dinner," spoke Trixy. "Gloria——"

"I couldn't——"

"You have got to, young lady," directed Dr. Daly. "I don't mind having patients but I don't

like to have them all in one day. You must rest quietly tonight with your friend."

And so it was arranged. Jane was driven on to her sister's but every rod of the way out to Trixy's she and Gloria made plans—new one's and record breakers.

Gloria, once started, never turned back, and the mystery of Echo Park was yet to be solved.

CHAPTER XX

MISGIVINGS

THE complete and sudden change from the unhappy conditions at Gormans' coupled with the exciting condition at her Aunt Harriet's, compared with the tranquillity and luxury at the home of Trixy Travers rather stunned Gloria. She refused to be a "mope," which to her meant having that abnormal trait of analysing such things, yet she could not shut out the question:

Why the Gormans? Why her aunt's nerves and remorse? And why Trixy's luck?

Lying wide eyed in the perfect bed in the perfect room, through which the faintest silver gleam from an invisible light filtered protectively, she wondered?

Like a petted child, her brain imposed upon her and sent thoughts leaping back to Barbend. There had been reality. Tommy, Millie, all the others, and over all, dear, wise Jane!

And now Millie was making new friends in the

city. Millie was friendly but she was also loyal. There could be no danger of her forgetting Gloria.

"And Trixy," prompted the tyrant brain that held sleep at arm's length; "Trixy liked Sherry Graves, the young man who had developed Echo Park. Talking about it all, just before they had separated for the night, Trixy had told Gloria that it was partly her own father's money which had financed the scheme, also that Ben Hardy and his family were friends of the Travers and friends of the Graves families, Sherry having been at school with young Ben.

"Of course," reasoned Gloria now, still too wide awake to be happy, "the big contractor was apt to know the big manufacturer, also Ben was apt to know Sherry. And Trixy would be interested in a park settlement out around Sandford. She's a model little citizen. She must have been fond of Sherry—just good pals, of course. That was what she said when she talked so earnestly of her sympathy for him. Too bad she has no brother to inspire."

Far away a bell tolled the late hour faintly.

"So late! I must get to sleep," determined Gloria, "for tomorrow will surely be another busy day." But panic and slumber never agree, and

the night in the beautiful room was quite a failure after all.

No amount of coaxing nor offers to bring out her best clothes would induce Gloria to remain with Trixy over Sunday.

"I just can't," she sighed. "I hardly understood things last night, and Uncle Charley will be home today. I have to talk to him."

"Will Hazel come home?" asked Trixy, raising her handsome brows quizzically.

"I hope not," confessed Gloria. "I would not be able to—to do things if she were looking on."

"Don't you like her, Glo?"

"I hardly know her, really. I don't dislike her, but somehow I feel dreadfully self conscious when she's around."

"Now, I like Hazel," defended Trixy. "She's got character and a lot of temperament, but still she's a good sport."

"What does that mean, just?" asked Gloria. They were out on the drive waiting for the car that was to take Gloria back to Maple Street. Trixy looked charming in her brilliant yellow sweater and her striped black and yellow skirt. Gloria wore her Kelly green sweater, the one

she made during vacation, and its depths of true green brought out the glitter of her dark eyes quite "Irishy," as Trixy said it.

A toot from the garage warned both of the time limit set upon their discussion.

"Why," faltered Trixy, "I think one is a good sport when she can lose without whining and when she tries to win over real obstacles. That's what Hazel is doing. She wants to sing and she will walk rough shod over her best friends to learn how."

"I don't call that good sportmanship," objected Gloria.

"Well, perhaps I put it too strongly. I should have said she would walk over obstacles. Of course friends can't be obstacles."

"If they understand," qualified Gloria, just as Jennings drew up in the sedan.

"I waited until the very last moment to tell you Ben is coming out tomorrow," dimpled Trixy. "I was afraid you might say you wouldn't take a ride with us."

"Ben Hardy!" There was surprise in Gloria's voice. "Of course I'll be glad to see him, in fact I was really going in to see him." It was her

dimples that played just now. "But I have a most important secret engagement for tomorrow afternoon."

"After school?"

"Yes, directly after."

"I know. It's with Marty at Echo Park!"

"May-be," admitted Gloria, accepting the affectionate little embrace offered by Trixy, and trying to express her own thanks for the hospitality, in between.

"Trixy is a dear," she concluded as she sat back in the cushions.

"Gloria is a love," said Trixy as she raced her little poodle back to the house.

"If Trixy doesn't get too fashionable," went on Gloria's ruminating. "She's so pretty and so very stylish."

"If Gloria doesn't go to being clever," worried Trixy. "She's apt to go off, grow pale, and write a book. Wouldn't that be dreadful? Full of Tommy's and Marty's! Now, if I ever wrote a book I'd have a hero like Sherry. Poor Sherry!" Her eyes blinked and Bumble barked impatiently.

Of the day full of happenings, Gloria's long talk with her Uncle Charley stood out beyond the sunshine and above the shadows.

Aunt Harriet was so much better, relieved, her husband called it.

"And I'm going to get her away from this—it has mostly been my fault," admitted the big man as big men always do.

"Dr. Daly said all she needed was a change," agreed Gloria gladly. "It would be lovely for her to get away from Sandford."

"I'll get my cousin to come over for a week or ten days——"

"Why?"

"To be with you, of course."

"I'm going away with Jane," declared Gloria. "You don't mind, Uncle Charley? I've just got to. I—I—perhaps I need a change too."

"You look it!" he teased. That was so like her father. She couldn't help liking a man with those frank, fearless ways and that quick, swift understanding.

"All the same, Uncle Charley, please listen." They were out by the back hedge. It was new, like all things on Maple Street, and Gloria felt sorry for it. "You see I'm awfully interested in those Gorman children," ventured Gloria.

"Yes? And you have rather a practical way of showing it. You turned the trick when you got

that poor woman off to the hospital. Even I, a full grown man, hadn't managed that. Every time I gave little old Gorman twenty-five dollars he paid it on the moldy mortgage," complained Uncle Charley.

"And the old place is hardly fit to live in," added Gloria.

"Well, you did the right thing when you gave the money to Dr. Daly," went on Uncle Charley. "Although you have got to get that back with all the rest, some day." A little moan hung on the last word.

Gloria was fairly vibrating with expectancy. She was going to meet Marty directly after school next day, and together they were going through the model house. Marty had his father's key. She wanted dreadfully to talk about it all to Uncle Charley, but could not bring herself to do so. He might say: "Wait until I can go with you." There was something in his manner that warned her.

She could not take such a chance as that. It would be too much to ask that she wait longer to see the mystery place, being human and having title to the house. Fancy that! So she said

nothing of her plans, although she felt they must be written on her face.

"Let's walk down the road a ways," suggested her uncle. "Your aunt is at the window and she may think we are——"

"Plotting," supplied Gloria.

As they walked he seemed very serious and abstracted.

"Is Hazel coming home?" asked Gloria presently.

"No. Not just now. She telephoned last night and wanted to come but her mother wouldn't hear of it. I'll tell you, Gloria, I'm afraid the old man has been rather a bear."

"Nonsense, Uncle Charley," exclaimed the girl. "Daddy would have been worse. He can't stand debt."

"That's just it. It all seemed so foolish. But Hattie listened too long to the lure. Who wouldn't want to double a little money when it looked so easy? Of course Lottie was interested, but she kept it clear that the money was yours. Hazel had had her share."

It was horrible to see him remorseful; first for Aunt Hattie and then for himself. He repeat-

edly blamed himself for her illness, and declared nothing now would prevent him from making it up to her as well as he could. The trip to Summerfield's would be a joy to Hattie Macumber, for there she had spent her best youth, and there her friends still lived.

"I see you had a letter from dad," he said next. "And I understand he may come over to our Western coast?"

"Yes. Isn't that fine? I always knew the firm would find him a star at that end of the business. Who could resist dad?"

"Personality plus, they call it. I agree with you he has that."

"And he's met a young American," Gloria was enthusiastic now. "Some one travelling for his health, he may travel West with dad," she rattled on. "They'll have to come through New York."

"And stop off."

"Surely."

"What won't all you girls do to that one foreign traveller?" tossed the man rather indifferently.

"The funny part of it is we all said dad would have to bring back a prince. Now I suppose he will be——"

"A pauper," said Uncle Charley. Presently all that was forgotten and again they talked of the big problem.

"Giving up your coat money was—heroic," Uncle Charley insisted. "I'm not saying much, Hallelujah," (his pet name for her) "but I'm thinkin'."

"It wasn't heroic one bit," contradicted Gloria, pressing close to his arm. "I just wanted to, the same as I wanted dad to go away. It's all bosh to say I'm brave when I'm just vain. I like to do what I want to do so much, that I can't stand not to. So that's why I tricked dad into going away, and that's why I got Mrs. Gorman to the hospital. I perfectly love to think about such things after, and there's not a bit of real goodness in doing it."

"Well," said the man who now turned back to the new little hedge, "it's a first rate imitation of being good, and so far as I'm concerned I wouldn't ask for anything better." He pinched her arm playfully. "But just wait until Spring comes! Then we'll see which way the cat jumps."

She wondered what he meant. Trixy had said the engineers wouldn't even look seriously at Echo Park until Spring, but she, Gloria, was going to look at it tomorrow. She turned away, thought-

fully and afterwards remembered the shiver she tried to shake off.

"Guess we're in for an all night rain," Uncle Charley remarked as if he divined she planned against such a contingency.

"And all day tomorrow?" asked Gloria eagerly.

"Well, no. The wind's shifting. I guess the night will finish it. And Gloria," he paused and deliberated. Then: "Don't worry about things tomorrow," he said. "Just let Martha attend to everything; she owes it to Hattie. And you go out with Trixie to see Jane, if you care to. I'm ashamed to have left you two alone here so much, but that Gorman fellow simply hounded me," he admitted.

"Oh, Uncle Charley! Well, he's got a good new hundred now and I guess Dr. Daly will make him attend to his own little flock. They're just like chicks, always peeping or—cackling. All except Marty and he's a perfect little man."

"Like your friend Tommy, eh?" teased Uncle Charley.

"A lot," admitted Gloria.

CHAPTER XXI

ECHO PARK

If only the rain would cease!

It had poured all night and thus far all day, but it was sure to change at three o'clock; Jane always said so.

There had been no chance to speak with Trixy, she left school at two-thirty and now, time for Gloria to leave, the excitement she suppressed all day was threatening to break out—violently.

Even Squire Hanaford's attempt to make her understand the importance of having a house and lot transferred to her, big, wonderful thing that it was, really seemed trifling compared with the thrill of actually exploring her own house. A deed! Just a document like so many of her dad's, but the house!

What if the Board of Health had condemned it? Squire Hanaford was right when he said they paid too much attention to new places and none to old. Hadn't Gloria seen the Gorman

kitchen leak like a sieve in the lightest shower Saturday afternoon?

She was borrowing Mona's wheel again. Marty brought it back, all shined up Sunday right after Sunday School, and Mona didn't mind in the least lending it a second time. The wheel Marty would ride was sort of mongrel, being composed of many varieties, but it would "go," he had declared, so that was the only and important consideration.

"The sun's out!"

"Who cares," retorted Natalie Warren. "The day is over now."

"I care. I'm going some place." Gloria couldn't hide her eagerness.

"Oh. I suppose you're going riding with Beatrix Travers," sneered the petulant Natalie. "Well, I can't see how some folks can put on such airs."

"I can," flung back Gloria, with a face pulled unbecomingly out of shape.

As she hurried home a group fell in easily to Natalie's mood. They stared after her and "simped." Natalie had a way of collecting audiences on such occasions, and Gloria Doane was ever a popular topic for dissection. Not that

any one added much to Natalie's opinion. They didn't need to. It was always causticly complete, but they did coincide, thoroughly.

"She's too stuck up to live!"

"Isn't she!"

That was about the gist of it.

But the unfriendly ones had their troubles for their opinions, as Gloria hurried home, first making sure her Aunt Hattie was better, and then proceeding to wheel away. Mrs. Towers was getting well as quickly "as a lanced finger" Martha Drake said, and her real trouble had been the delaying in "lancing," this term representing the unburdening of her mind on Gloria's money and the house deed that stood for it. No questions were asked when Gloria waved a good-bye and promised to be back "early," but she turned her head over her shoulder and shouted "good-bye" again as she sped out the gate through the low cut hedge.

"I guess I'm romantic," she was accusing, that one persistent thought of "her own house that nobody wants" demanding constant mental attention. "But all the same, it's more interesting than going to a poky old boarding school," she decided.

Marty met her at the Twin Butternuts. He wanted to tell her so many things about his reconstructed home, with Mrs. Berg there all the time, and the baby sleeping all night long, and his mother going to be operated upon, that Gloria felt obliged to accept the appreciated report with a hasty word and reminder. They had to hurry, it might rain again.

"And dad's tickled to death," he flung in recklessly. "Says the op'ration 'ul fix ma fine, and says she's got a swell nurse," he puffed, in rhythm to the pumping of his wheel.

"Is he satisfied about the money now?" Gloria asked. She hoped he would cease "hounding" her Uncle Charley.

"Oh, ye'ah, yeah, sure," replied Marty. "Gee whiz! He thinks you girls are wonders!"

They were leaving the village behind them now, and entering one of those suburbs outlined by indiscriminate dumps, struggling trees, railroad gardens and fearless, little, puddily brooks.

"We're near there," announced the scout. "This is the junction."

"Not very attractive," said Gloria too low for Marty to hear, but just now she was fearful of disappointment in her Echo Park interests.

"But it's all cleaned up fine out further," added Marty. "This is kinda rough, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Gloria, grasping her handle bar desperately while Marty fairly hugged his.

"Lots o' puddles," he remarked again. Marty was never dull company.

"Yes; we had a lot of rain. Sure you've got the key?"

"You betcha'," and he clapped a hand over his sweater pocket. "It's on a long string, can't lose it."

"Don't," cautioned Gloria.

"Never been out here before?" he asked pompously.

"No, I thought it was all a sort of fairy tale."

"Ain't it? That's what ma used to say. She said maybe a fairy would move in and settle her family there. They ain't afraid of water in the cellar," he scoffed approvingly.

"Oh, what a pretty——"

"That's it! That's the park! Ain't it swell?"

"Lovely," breathed Gloria. Without the warning of even a smoothed road they had fairly spilled into the park—Echo Park! A rustic sign swinging from a real home grown, non-trans-

planted, little white birch tree, announced in quaint letters, cut deep into a barked shingle:

ECHO PARK

"Oh," exclaimed Gloria. "Isn't it beautiful!"

"Ain't it," paraphrased Marty. "And ain't they the dubs to condemn it?"

"Looks so," murmured Gloria. They were off their wheels and entering the park.

"See that pretty little house in the hollow, back of the hill? That's it!"

"Mine!"

"Ain't it a peach?" babbled the guide. His manner was as enthusiastic as might have been the real estate agent's in the rustic office to the left—had an agent been there.

Speechless now, Gloria carefully placed her wheel against a tree and followed Marty along the winding path. Although it was almost winter, the beauty and solace of soft beds of colored leaves, of rich meadow grass clinging faithfully to its task, of swaying birches like girls of the family guarded by big oaks—the men with ruddy color, all this was too impressive to be overlooked.

"Swell, ain't it?" again prompted Marty.

"I can't imagine——"

"Could y'u? Dad says it was just mean politics because some of the Board of Health didn't get the pipin' jobs. Y'u see, these streets is all new."

"Yes, and it's all laid out like a landscape garden!"

"That's what it is. That there Sherry was some swell boss. He had maps and pictures——"

"Did you know him?"

"Sur-r-r-r. I helped him lots of times."

They made one more turn along a new pebbly path and were there in front of the one, lone, solitary model cottage.

"Gloria's!"

She stopped to grasp the strange situation. It was unbelievable. That a house like that, with artistic green shingles resting on a veritable vase of concrete should be left idle and condemned.

"Swell!" breathed the inexhaustible Marty. "An' dad did all that. Look at that foundation!"

She was looking at it all. Trying to understand the blight, and Nature's blunder.

"No wonder Aunt Hattie risked it!" she said. "This looks too good to be any risk at all."

"Don't it!" Marty was dangling the key. "They're dubs—them health fellows. Water in the cellar ain't so bad. We often have it."

Shadows warned them. "We better hurry," said Gloria. "I'm so excited. I wonder shall we find the fairy keeping house?"

"Nope. Fairies don't like inspectors, I guess, and this house gets inspected every time the health fellows think of it. We go in the front door," grandly. "I've got matches an' a candle, too."

"It won't get dark?"

"The cellar's dark and that's the curiosity."

Not even a shove was necessary to open the quaint door. It swung back gladly as Gloria stepped within. She breathed and gasped a little, then smiled broadly and threw Marty a look of complete satisfaction. He was watching for it. He wanted to see how surprised she would be and he withheld his impatient questions.

"I can't believe it," she murmured.

"Could you?" he followed. "But just wait. Of course it ain't all finished, but you can see. This is the living room—swell? This—here's the dining room. That's the built in boo-fay." He paused before the leaded glass cabinet, fondly,

proudly. "And just wait, see here, ain't that some kitchen?"

"Simply—beautiful," Gloria couldn't adequately express her delight. In fact, a real fairy over by that long, white built-in table, mixing up an angel cake, could hardly have added to her surprise, it was all so fairy like.

"It's a model, you know," explained Marty. "They call it the model bungalow, but there's an upstairs. Come on up." He was as eager as little Dick had been when Trixy's car swung up the path, or as Tommy had been when he fetched Miss Trivett's potted geranium slip to his mother. Boys were so satisfactory, thought Gloria. They always seemed so genuine. Perhaps lack of polish displayed their personal gleams.

Upstairs fully sustained the reputation of the first floor. While the woodwork was unfinished it was all so prettily laid out.

"Here's where the bathroom was to be. See the holes for the shower?" Marty stood in the basin-bed and looked up, probably feeling an invisible shower trickle over him delightfully.

"And it's all wired for the lights," commented Gloria. "What ever did they intend to do with

it? Surely no sensible man would leave a place like this?"

"But there wasn't any more money! And Sherry Graves got sick, awful sick. He just had to beat it for China or some place. So who was to finish it? Mr. Travers, your girl friend's father, told dad he'd see it through if he had to get engineers from Washington. But they don't dast tackle a job till Spring," concluded Marty with a wag of his business like head.

Gloria glanced out of a paint stained window. "We'll have to hurry, Marty," she said. "It will be dark early tonight."

"Sure. Come on down to the cellar. I'll bet it's full of the rain," he predicted.

They wended their way down to complete the novel survey.

The cellar door was under the stairs, between the dining room and kitchen.

CHAPTER XXII

TRAPPED

"FULL!"

"Be careful!"

"Hold the candle."

"Don't go down!"

"I wanna see how deep it is."

"Marty!"

"I'm all right." He was testing the depth with his stick. "Gee whiz! Look!" He held up the lath but it was too dark for Gloria to see the water mark.

She was crouched upon the top step of the stairs, peering over the candle flame, confronted now with the enemy of so many ambitions: Water!

"Please, Marty!" she begged. "Don't wade in. It might have a suck hole!"

But Marty was fascinated. He loved water, even in the cellar of a model bungalow. His shoes and stockings dangled from the step—not the last step of the stairs, and his accommodating

trousers, without knee button or other security, had been rolled high as a fisherman's.

"'Tain't a bit cold," he gurgled. "I wanna see if it's pourin' in anywheres."

Gloria shivered. It was dark, drafty and fearful there. She too was anxious to know why a cellar full of water could work such sinister disaster, but she didn't like to stay there, with that reckless little boy, when night was threatening.

"I see it!" he called. "Here's the spring—or somethin'!" Again the stick was thrust down.

He tried to withdraw it, then——

A scream from Gloria!

"Marty!"

He was down! In that black pool! In that muddy water!

Only pausing to see the candle in a safe place she stepped down and into the water.

"Put your head up, Marty," she shrieked.

"Ye'ah," came the welcome answer. "It's me leg. It's broke, I guess."

She reached him, somehow. "Get hold of me, quick! I'm afraid I'll fall. Oh! See! That water spout!"

Marty was clinging to her but he couldn't look. The pain in his ankle blinded him more than the

GLORIA AND MARTY STARTED TO INSPECT THE CELLAR.

muddy water had. He gasped and breathed hard, but he did not give in.

"Oh, you poor boy! Can't you put your foot under you at all?" Gloria was now thoroughly frightened.

"It hurts!" admitted the boy, taking the injured leg in one hand while he clung to Gloria with the other.

She was shivering. Not cold! That water! It was icy!

"Put your arms around my neck," she commanded. "I can get you out."

"I'm heavy——"

"No matter. Hurry! I'm freezing!"

Never was a stream forded more perilously. If she slipped they would both be down, and there was that gurgling, swirling little pool, over where a furnace ought to have been.

"Hold tight," she cautioned. "Just a few more steps!"

Out of the water, and on to the narrow landing at the foot of the stairs at last. She turned to let Marty slide down from her shoulders.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Wasn't it awful! But your foot. Where does it hurt?"

"Here." He touched the injured ankle. "I

went in a hole! Gosh! the whole bottom must be out of the cellar. It's like a river!"

"Maybe it is—a lost river. But wait till I get the candle and see your ankle."

A slam! A door slam! They both started.

"Gee whiz! The door's slammed shut!" exclaimed Marty, dismay echoing in that water filled basin.

"Can't we open it?"

"It's a spring! From the other side."

"Marty! We're not locked in this hole!"

"Yep, I'm afraid so!"

"Oh, Marty!" She was up at the door, candle in hand. She pushed! She pounded! It was locked, tight, with the catch on the other side!

"Oh-h-h!" Terror and panic seized her. What an awful thing had happened!

And no one even knew where they were!

Poor Marty, with a sprained ankle! She must not frighten him into a panic. She turned back and crept down the skeleton stairs.

"Can't I get to a window?" she asked breathlessly.

"That one, over the big hole, is the only one with glass in," Marty managed to answer. "The others is all barred up."

"It's right over the whirlpool!" she faltered. "And it's deep——"

"You bet it is! I didn't want to tell you, but I thought sure I was in China."

Holding the candle high above her head Gloria glared at the forbidding hole they were trapped in.

It was terrible, awful! They were trapped, locked in a cellar with that awful ill smelling water all about them.

"Marty!" she gasped, sinking down beside him on the little landing. "Marty, what shall we do?"

"Pray," answered Marty. "Maybe some 'un 'ill come!"

That was the boy's way. To ask and to hope! She had only seen despair. But now she remembered. Trixy and Ben were to ride out to Aunt Hattie's for her, and she, Trixy, knew they were coming to Echoes!

"If only I could get to that window," she panted. "Maybe Trixy will come!"

"Sure! Listen! There's a car!"

The unmistakable honk-honk of a friendly car sounded like Gabriel's trumpet—if paradise had been promised to all.

"Yes," exclaimed Gloria, holding to Marty's

wet coat to keep from falling over the narrow platform. "That's Trixy and Ben!"

"Ben?"

"Yes. A friend from—my home town. Oh, if I can only make them hear!"

Gathering a long full breath she called:

"Trixy! Tri-x-y——Trix!!!"

She pealed out the syllables with every bit of power she could command. But the horn honked uninterruptedly.

Then Marty tried it. He cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled! "Trix-ee! Hey, there! Trix-ee Trav-verse! Whoo-hoo!!" His voice echoed with an uncanny resonance, but the horn of the car outside never listened.

Gloria dropped her arm from his shoulder. "They can't hear us," she murmured.

"No. The drive is blocked with big planks across, and they have to stop way down by the cedars."

"Oh, Marty," wailed Gloria. "They're going! Listen!"

The car was chugging. Surely they were turning back.

Terror seized Gloria Doane! Would they have to die there!

"Give me the candle," she shrieked.

"What y'u gonna do?"

"Get to that window!"

"You can't!"

"I must. I'll climb the beams!"

"You might fall in!"

"I won't. Oh, Marty! There, put the candle right in the middle of that board."

Then she swung to the rough beams. The splinters cut into her hands but she swung from one post to another, clinging without seeming to breathe.

"Glory! Care-ful!" begged the boy in a pained whisper, fearful that even a word would shock her hands from their perilous hold.

"There," he said again. "Rest there! Get your breath."

How spacious the little cellar seemed! And how black the water beneath! She could hear it bubble and swirl, coming in and forcing out.

If only she could reach that next post! But how her hands hurt! She could feel the blood wet in her palms. And her body was like lead, dragging on the lacerations.

"Hold it!" cautioned Marty. "Now swing!"

Somehow she did it. She was on the other

side of the cellar within a few feet of the rescuing windows.

"Easy! Don't slip!"

"Oh, I won't now," she declared, her hands free once more as she crouched in a nest of posts with cross pieces forming uprights. "I hear the car! I must smash that window!"

As far about her as she could reach she tried for loose timber. But it was all securely nailed. Again the terror of failure. Then:

"Oh, I see it! A piece of pipe!"

She had crawled to the window but dared not break it with her bare hands. Now she had the bit of iron, and protecting her face from the impact—she thrust the bar through the glass.

Smash!

"Trixy!" she shrieked. Then she held frantically to the window edge and braced her feet against the beams.

She felt her head brush something!

Everything had gone black!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RESCUE

WET! And buzzing!

She breathed again but her veins felt as if bursting. That was consciousness coming back. She had fainted in the cellar and she was now——

"Tommy!"

"Glory!" The voice was like a murmur through the trees and it was Tommy's; Tommy Whitely. He was there, bending over her!

Struggling back as from a hideous dream she remembered. There was Trixy too, holding her head and that was Ben. But Marty!

"Oh, get him! Get Marty!" she begged, springing upright from the friendly arms.

"Where is he?" Ben Hardy knew she could not have been there alone.

"In the cellar! Oh, that awful cellar. But the door—the front door is open!"

Her voice sounded miles away, and her eyes,

they burned like fire. She brushed a hand——

"What's that!" she gasped. It was dark and wet.

"You cut your hands. But don't worry. You'll be all right. Poor little Gloria." Trixy kissed away the mud smudge from the darling face now ghastly white from that horrible fainting spell. "We had to drag you out the window."

"Oh, it was awful," she breathed. "But I'm all right now. I must get Marty."

"Are you sure you can walk?"

"I feel better moving. It was just fright, panic!" declared Gloria, actually getting to her feet, noting the auto robe she had been resting upon and remembering Marty's hurt ankle.

"Oh, he can't walk!" she exclaimed. "We must bring the robe——"

But when they got there Ben Hardy was on the little landing in the cellar, with Tommy Whitely astride the rail, and Marty Gorman was talking a blue streak.

"Yes, sir! Right over there. Flash your ligh' and you kin see it——" he insisted.

The handy pocket light was flashed at the guilty pool that still bubbled, and swirled and even splashed against the wall occasionally.

"Sure as you live!" exclaimed Ben, the young student.

Trixy and Gloria stood at the top of the stairs. The spring lock was now securely fastened back.

"What—is—it?" asked Trixy.

"A lost river. An underground river!" replied Ben triumphantly.

"Isn't it dreadful," moaned Gloria. "And I had hoped it might be fixed."

"Dreadful! It's wonderful! Fixed? You bet it can! Sherry always declared this was some magic influence. Well, I'm jiggered." The pocket light seemed to flash like a head light in the darkness as he directed it from one spot to another.

"And y'u kin drain it?" eagerly asked Marty, apparently forgetting the ankle.

"Nothing to it," replied Ben. "With a gang of men and one of dad's machines! Oh, say," he was too jubilant for words. "Won't this be great. Say, Glo!" (it didn't seem too familiar now) "Let me have the contract? I'll turn this into the finest little park ever. And the land will be worth oodles!"

"Now, easy, Ben," cautioned Trixy pleasantly. "My own 'paw' is interested here!"

"And so's mine. He has shares——" interrupted Marty, cracking his voice explosively.

"Well, I've got the deeds," Gloria managed to recall. She was almost inarticulate.

"And don't I figure?" asked Tom, shyly.

"You'll have too," declared Gloria. "But do let us rescue poor Marty. He's hurt."

"Not much now, it don't," declared Marty. "It's most better. I could walk, maybe."

"You don't have to. What am I here for? Of course Gloria had to come to. She was afraid I might carry her," teased the overjoyed Ben.

To find an underground river! And to turn it into a beautiful lake! To drain the little settlement! How wonderful!

"I knew I'd strike luck out here," Ben said in Marty's ear as he carried him, although the comment was meant for the girls. "But, Gloria, you had a mighty close call."

"Don't talk of it, not yet, at any rate," Gloria begged. "Marty, why didn't you let them know you were in the cellar?"

"Let them know. I couldn't speak. I thought—I thought you was dead!"

"Poor Marty."

"Here now, cheer up," ordered Ben, tugging along with the small boy in his strong arms.

Gloria smiled. "Tommy Whitely, tell me how you got here?" she asked.

"Came out with Ben."

"And growled all the way because he hadn't come before," said Ben. "Well, our picnic is spoiled, Tom, but this isn't so bad."

"Oh! Your big car!" exclaimed Gloria as they faced the open depot wagon.

"Surest thing," agreed Ben. "And we were all loaded up for a jolly time. Just look at that basket of apples! Tom's contribution."

"And be careful of the other stuff. That's Ben's contribution," mocked Tom.

"Wait until I deposit the patient. Here, Trix, please——"

"Oh, say! I'm all right. I kin sit right on that basket——"

"No, you can't either. Sit here," ordered Ben. "We may make camp yet."

There was plenty of room in the four seated town car, one of those open-sided, covered-topped, bright yellow wagons, that always look so jolly and have no passenger limit.

The fragrant fruit, fresh from Barbend, the

bag of hickory nuts, Gloria knew so well the trees that contributed these—then the little flower pot with a pink bloom sticking out of a paper bag under the front seat—that would be a potted slip of Jane's house geranium.

The two discarded bicycles were tied on the roof of the car as they started off.

"We'll stop at Dr. Daly's with that ankle," announced Trixy. "Glo, you must be miserable in those wet things, but just think of the good times coming!"

"I do!" The thought must have been overwhelming for Gloria seemed to choke on it.

"I tell you, honest, Miss Travers, I don't need no doctor," protested Marty.

"Just to have a look," decided Ben. "Which way, Trix?"

"In that side street. That lamp post. Here we are!"

Gloria protested successfully against "bringing in" her cut and bruised hands. She just wouldn't.

The doctor was in, although Marty hoped he wasn't. He hated to have those muddy feet of his overhauled.

"Just a strained ligament," pronounced the big

friendly man. He patted Marty fondly. "Keep off the foot all you can for a few days."

Outside Gloria was pacifying Tommy. She felt guilty of desertion but couldn't he see? Wasn't there an awful lot for her to do out in Sandford?

"And you're very good friends with Ben now, aren't you?" she asked.

"You bet. He's taught me a lot. Ben's awful smart What he says he can do he does. Just you wait and see him drain out your muddy cellar," enthused Tommy, his eyes as blue as ever.

"I believe he will," agreed Gloria. Trixy and Ben were leading Marty back now. His smile sent the verdict on ahead.

" 'Tain't nuthin'," he elucidated.

"Just a strain," appended Trixy.

"Then please, let's hurry back to Auntie's," begged Gloria. "She'll think I'm lost and have——"

"Another fit!" laughed Trixy. "But I'm going to wait for you this time," she insisted. "We can wait until you change into dry things. I'm not going to have this celebration postponed an hour longer."

It was decided to let the boys wait out in the car.

"I don't know how to tell Aunty about it all. She always declared 'Echoes' was a beauty spot and worth everything promised," faltered Gloria.

"If only Sherry could know," sighed Trixy, holding back by the honeysuckle to whisper it.

"Can't Ben write to him?" asked Gloria.

"No address. He just cut everything and traveled. There's your aunt."

At the sight of Gloria her Aunt Hattie stifled a little squeal. The muddy shoes and bedraggled skirt!

"I was afraid you would get stuck in the mud on that wheel," she suggested, smiling most hospitably to Trixy. "We've had such a lot of rain."

"Aunty, it isn't that," almost cried Gloria, forgetting everything but the history of Aunt Lottie's money. "But I've been out to Echoes! And it's a gold mine!"

"What do you mean, Gloria! Come inside!"

Then she tried to tell her, while Martha fetched dry things. Her Aunt Hattie would not let Gloria pause long enough in the fairy story

to put on her own shoes, although she had insisted upon changing the other garments.

The little woman's face was like a newly trimmed lamp, with a fresh wick, shining chimney and a pretty shade. It shone!

"And you know, Mrs. Towers," murmured the complacent Trixy, "it was my friend Sherry Graves, who planned all that!"

"Sherry Graves! Of course, I remember! Gloria, I'm a stupid woman. Where's that telegram, Martha?"

It was produced by Martha, the yellow telegraph sheet with its transcribed cable message. Gloria read aloud:

"Arrive New York Sunday with friend Sherwood Graves."

"Gloria!" almost shrieked Trixy. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know. Dad said he had met a young man—traveling for his health, but he gave no name."

Trixy had snatched the message and was out the door rushing to the waiting car.

"Ben!" she cried. "It's a message from Sherry! He's coming back with Mr. Doane."

This made the climax complete.

It was well for Marty Gorman that the injured ankle needed no further attention for some hours. What with running back and forth, from Trixy's to Gloria's, to the telephone booth for Ben to phone home, and for Tommy to send a message to his mother (he had to wait for Ben to get back to Barbend), of course Gloria had to phone Jane, who promised to be out early next morning, and then Mrs. Towers begged that they run over to Layton to tell her husband, there was no phone in his boarding place; altogether it was very late indeed before the intense excitement subsided.

They were at Mrs. Towers now. Martha had given the boys supper, while Ben and Gloria were served at Trixy's.

"And Marty Gorman, how is your mother?" asked Aunt Hattie considerately.

"Fine," said Marty indifferently.

"Getting on, I mean?" explained the surprised questioner.

"All right," flung back Marty. "They're goin' to op'rate." There was pride in his voice easy to translate. Hadn't they always hoped for that operation?

Mrs. Towers smiled knowingly. "Of course," she said, "she will be all right after that. And there'll be plenty of money now if this thing goes through."

The others were back. Ben had talked to his father on the phone, and the experienced contractor readily agreed with all his son's suggestions.

"There is no doubt of it, dad says," he told Mrs. Towers. "In fact, he can see even bigger things than I grasped in the excitement. But depend upon it, you will all be drawing dividends from Echo Park stock before three months' time."

"Then Hazel can take from Madam Martinelli," said the devoted mother.

"Singing lessons," explained Gloria, to Ben's raised eyebrows.

"And when the water is all gone from that cellar we'll have a big housewarming," declared Gloria, rather proudly.

"You bet chu!" chimed in the jubilant Marty.

But Tommy Whitely's face was inscrutable behind his fading freckles.

THE END

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